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THE
SCRIPTURE JEWISH HISTORY,

ILLUSTRATED AND IMPROVED IN A VARIETY OF

SHORT DISCOURSES,

COMPREHENDING

THEIR LAWS, MORAL AND CEREMONIAL;

ECCLESIASTICAL AND CIVIL POLITY;

THEIR SECTS, AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES;

WITH SEVERAL ALLUSIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

TO EACH OF THEM;

CHIEFLY FOR

THE BENEFIT OF THE UNLEARNED.

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1 Cor. 10, 11. *Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.*

John v 39. *Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me.*

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BY WILLIAM DALRYMPLE, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT AIR.

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INSCRIBED,

WITH ALL DUE RESPECT,

TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE

COUNTESS OF HARDWICK,

A ZEALOUS PATRONESS OF THE POOR,

BY HER LADYSHIP'S

MUCH OBLIGED,

AND

HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

AIR, JUNE,

THE whole is divided into nine Parts, agreeable to the recommendation of the late learned Doctor G. Campbell of Aberdeen, in his Lectures upon Ecclesiastical History.

- I. *From the Creation till the Call of Abraham.*
- II. *From that, till Jacob's Journey into Egypt.*
- III. *Till the Deliverance from Egypt, by the passing through the Red Sea.*
- IV. *Till the Death of Moses.*
- V. *Till the Death of Joshua.*
- VI. *Till the Commencement of the Israelitish Monarchy.*
- VII. *Till the Defection of the Ten Tribes from Rehoboam.*
- VIII. *Till the Captivity.*
- IX. *The Restoration of the Two Tribes of Judah and Benjamin.*

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P R E F A C E.

IT is well observed by the late pious, learned, and every way excellent Doctor JOHN JORTIN, in his sermon upon Deut. xvi. 16, 17. vol. 6th. "That so connected are the law and the gospel, that the New Testament can never be well understood without a complete knowledge of the Old, and that the ceremonial law, though inferior to the moral law, was not so void of use as some have imagined; nor was it an arbitrary imposition, purely for the sake of correcting an unruly people, but was undoubtedly instituted for wise, and good, and merciful ends."

It is therefore to be regretted, that though many large and useful works have been published upon the scripture Jewish history, yet none of small compass, and proportionable easy price, for the benefit of those who have little either of money or time to spare. The case is affecting, and ought to have been remedied long ere now. Consistent with my knowledge, this has not been done. An attempt then humbly offered, and without either expecting, or wishing for what is secular from it, may meet with approbation, and possibly give a hint to some more able hand for future times.

Mean while, having had life lengthened out beyond expectation, I knew not how to close a Fifty-seventh Year's Ministry with more advantage to myself, and good design for the service of those who desire to be scripturally informed. Nor has it been a light work in respect of pains; since first, the whole was gone over with strict critical inquiry; again, by written discourses at some length upon each subject of moment; and last of all, by these abridged in the form now presented to the public view. The whole occupying leisure hours from other ministerial duties for some years.

A few things in perusal, the author wishes may be seriously adverted to, that prior to the reading of any single discourse, which may be done in the space of less than ten minutes, the
chapter

chapter or paragraph to which the text belongs be attentively read over ; then the passages referred to as evidences, and practically improving after both ; should be leisurely thought upon.

This, under God, will render the work useful, and nothing less well can. A cursory or hasty reading will be of little service. A private hour after public worship, with an allowance for necessary cheerful meetings at home, may be in common well spared. The garden or fields will not be improper places at times. Very soon will the serious head of a family be able to instruct children and servants, if not kept too long together. A catechetical exercise, by judicious selection of questions and answers suitable to age, should not be neglected.

History is the chief mode of education which God hath fixed upon from the beginning. Things which we have heard and known, and which our fathers have told us, are not to be hid from their children, shewing thus to the generations to come, as in Psal. lxxviii. 3, &c. a noble and instructive passage.

Every endeavour has been made that could be thought of to make the purchase easy, and yet after all, it may be hard upon some ; which loudly calls for aid from the rich. Keeping this work out of sight, I know few charities equal to that of scattering among the poor small practical compositions, especially if they are bound, and not expensively. It is a method taken by infidels and others, for poisoning young minds with wild and extravagant ideas, which ought to be counteracted. I speak this as unto wise. An eminently pious and mild writer upon disputed points in religion, has well said, " That men chosen of God for important purposes, and therefore extraordinarily favoured by him, were not, nor was it necessary they should be faultless persons ; that in the infancy of a commonwealth of a nature so peculiar as that of the Hebrews, a sharper discipline might, at first, be needed." Again, " That if such a mind as that of late Lord Shaftsbury had met with such moral statutes as are contained in the five books of Moses, in any of the Heathen, Greek, or Roman authors, he would have highly celebrated them, and would have spared his rash severe censures of what he could not well comprehend." Farther, " With regard to the extermination of the idolatrous nations of Canaan, and the severities and destruction accompanying it, which has been much exaggerated, may it not also deserve to be considered, whether in the instance of a general destruction, enjoined of innocent children, and persons grown up, such proceedings might not be authorised by the righteous moral Governor of the world, in mercy to the unfortunate sufferers themselves, whilst in putting an end to the lives of his creatures, he put an end to the most horrid vice, in which the young would have been trained, and others grown worse ; by continuing in which they would only have
been

been more and more removed from, and with more difficulty recovered, and brought back to virtue, and to true happiness. Add to this, a most important consideration, that such temporary severities tended immediately to deter, and prevent the Israelites, and the nations around from becoming infected with, and going on in such practices, for which these people were doomed to suffer. I mean the practices of a bestiality not to be named; of the most defiling promiscuous commerce between the sexes; and of that dreadful superstition which led them to make their children pass through the fire, to be consumed in it, in honour of their false gods." Further still, "Concerning these distinguished persons, Noah, Abraham, and Lot, and some other worthy characters among the ancestors of the Israelites, in those early ages, there are unquestionably some things recorded, which are by no means to their credit, or to be imitated by us. A circumstance which does honour to the sacred historian, shewing him to be actuated by a regard to truth only in what he related, and resolved to tell things as they really happened; however it might make against some of the most favourite characters of his nation." Finally, "In all the charges of crime against the people of Israel, in their sacred books, they are not once accused of such as did disgrace both Greece and Rome, in their highest splendor as to both literature and the fine arts." Thus far our agreeable writer. And, when I so speak, I should not be understood as of the same mind with him in each of his peculiar opinions, for that is not the case. We do differ, and probably may, till we see no longer darkly as through glass, but as it were face to face; whilst we mutually bear and forbear, proving all things to hold fast that which is good. *Conversations on the Divine Government, by Theophilus Lindsey. Printed for J. Johnson.*

And now, referring to a late able vindication of the divine authority of the Old Testament, by the reverend Doctor Robert Findlay, Professor of Theology in the University of Glasgow, against the reasonings of the late Doctor Geddes, upon 2 Tim. iii. 15, 16. I heartily join my truly venerable friend in these his concluding devout aspirations. "May all who regard the scriptures of the Old Testament, in conjunction with these of the New, as the sole, but sure unerring standard of faith and practice, be careful to regulate their sentiments and conduct by them, and may all who have departed from the truth, with respect to their title to be thus esteemed, be brought to just conceptions about them."

What

What follows was written in a blank leaf at the end of his Bible, by the late SIR WILLIAM JONES, and cannot fail to please.

“ I have regularly and attentively read these holy scriptures, and am of opinion, that this volume, independantly of its divine origin, contains more true sublimity, more exquisite beauty, more pure morality, more important history, and finer strains both of poetry and eloquence than can be collected from all other books, in whatever age or language they may have been composed.

The two parts of which the scriptures consist are connected by a chain of compositions which bear no resemblance in form or style to any that can be produced from the stores of Grecian, Persian, or even Arabian learning. The antiquity of these compositions, no man doubts, and the unstrained application of them to events long subsequent to their publication, is a solid ground of belief, that they are genuine productions, and consequently inspired.”

It is recorded upon probable evidence, that the late Earl of Rochester, after his conversion, and in the hearing of some who had been intimate with him, with his hand laid upon the sacred volume, did say, “ Here is true philosophy, this the wisdom that speaks to the heart. A bad life is the only grand objection to this book.”

SHORT DISCOURSES

ON THE

HISTORICAL BOOKS

OF THE

OLD TESTAMENT.

PART I.

FROM THE CREATION TILL THE CALL
OF ABRAHAM.

GENESIS.

I. CREATION.

Chap. ii. 1. *Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*

SO speaks Moses, the celebrated lawgiver, by divine appointment, to the Jewish nation, and allowed ever since to have been the author of this Sacred Book. It is named *Genesis*, from a Greek word which signifies *beginning*; or an account of the origin of our earth in its present state; as also that of the whole Hebrew people after the *flood*. *Heaven and earth* are made use of to express our world.

The text refers to Chapter first, verse first, where God is said to have *created*, which does not always import giving existence where there was none before; but new modelling and arranging what happens to be then spoken of, as in the

present case, matter without form and void. Nothing hinders why thousands of ages may not have passed before this, and that in these the same materials may have been differently employed. Convulsions, not dissimilar to that of the flood, and which have left signs of these behind them, may also have been.

In a much later time however, the earth, which we now inhabit, had become, one way or other, without form and void. A rude undigested heap, like the line of confusion, and the stones of emptiness^a. Then the SPIRIT, denoting the *infinite power and wisdom of GOD*, did brood, as it were upon the deep dark abyss: hence arose beauty, order and life.

Whether wind was made use of, another idea affixed by some to the word spirit, is not material to inquire. Both cause and effects, for certain, were of the *Most High*. The first day's work was *light*; not quite easy to distinguish from that which is afterwards spoken of, the *sun and moon*. A mass of this sort might have been collected, whence these two great lights of heaven may have been formed; or one of them, at least the cause of the other, and indeed flowing from this, as a centre to the whole planetary system. The mode of expressing God's will in that matter has ever been the just admiration of all good judges. He said, so to speak, *let there be light, and there was light*. Instant as thought was this amazing work.

Again the *firmament* or *air* was made, by a *like will*, to divide clouds above from fountains beneath, when either of them should take place, with rivers, lakes, and other vast receptacles from each. Objects, ever to be seen with delight, and pious emotion. Whatever the first day's work was, it seems to have formed the distinction of day and night, so joyous still tous. And GOD saw that all was good, or in an exact agreement with his own unerring mind. Thus day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge^b.

^a Isaiah, xxxiv. 11.

^b Psal. xix. 2.

Next comes the waters under the heavens to be gathered together, and to make the dry land appear : that is *earth* and *seas*, properly speaking. Though blended before, they are now seen to be most distinct ^c.

Nor doth what follows out of verse 11th lessen our regard. GOD said, or did will, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and so on likewise with the fruit trees. Equally astonishing as the larger works of omnipotence, if even not more so. How various are each of the above, and yet how agreeably distinguished ! each having seeds in them sufficient to cover the earth, if allowed to spread. But they are made pleasant to eat, and nourish, as well as to continue their kinds ^d.

Further still, GOD said, or willed, verse 14th, Let there be lights in the firmament, to divide yet more precisely, and in all time coming, the day from the night ; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, for days and for years : all of easy apprehension, from long experience, and yet, to those who are most inquisitive, stupendous proofs of the divine wisdom, power and love. What grateful varieties do spring, summer, autumn, and even winter exhibit ! The whole produced from two most simple movements of our own earth. Philosophy explains with aptitude what the scriptures, in easy, popular language do hold out to the least instructed part of mankind ^e. With certain returns of light and warmth, all nature is cherished ; men, beasts, herbs, trees, and plants live. In the affairs of navigation, husbandry, trade and commerce, their benefits are unmeasurable.

Yet what are all inanimate works, even the most splendid of them, to those which have life, and power given them to enjoy ? And GOD said, verse 20th, Let the waters bring forth abundantly, the moving creature, and the fowls to fly. Let each be fruitful and multiply. So, in what follows ; let the earth be fruitful, and each living creature after its kind. All which took instant place, both wild and tame. Truly adorable !

^c Psal. civ. from verse 6. Job xxxviii. 8. ^d Psal. civ. 14, &c.

^e Psal. xix. 1. &c.

Upon the whole, how clear is it that the *world* had a *beginning*? The scripture in this respect, is confirmed by the only sure records of time. Beyond five thousand years, all is fancy and fiction. Again, as an obvious consequence, God alone is *eternal*: a divine attribute, so far as we are able to conceive, quite incommunicable, and proper to *necessary self-existence*. Hear, O *Israel*, the *LORD thy GOD is one GOD*. To propagate a sense therefore, of this *SUPREME BEING*, is indispensable duty, and the chief end of all our sacred books. How pleasant and useful! Here the origin of things, and their progress meet us with satisfactory accounts, and no where else. From this, it were easy to show, that all ancient mythologists have derived any imperfect ideas of what they have either been able or willing to transmit. But to know God, duty, and happiness from thence ought to be our chief concern. Amen.

II. MAN MADE.

Chap. i. 26. *And GOD said, Let us make Man in our image, and after our likeness.*

HERE, as though deliberating, or consulting, the style is varied, from saying, *Let things be*, to *Let us make Man*; to manifest a distinction of his *excellency*.

The book of Job ^a has led some to suppose that God so spake, as above, to *angels*, who appear to have been witnesses of each day's glorious work, and to have shouted with joy. But to conjecture in matters of this sort is not safe. A modest just sense given to the plural number is that of *majesty*. So kings upon earth say, *Our will is*; *We command and ordain*. Mere niceties would be unedifying, and simplicity is one great test of truth.

As for the image of God in Man, we may premise, that both male and female were to have the same privileges.

First, that of *understanding*. Other creatures, though inferior, are not without some knowledge ; but they appear to be destitute of what belongs to things spiritual. They may be taught to apprehend the import of certain looks, movements, and language ; yet not in any degree to rise above their own existence. What lengths they can go soon terminates ; and it is in vain to expect benefit from any religious conversation with them. This is *Man's* next great prerogative. An essential branch of the image of GOD in him. Whence says St. Paul ^b, being *renewed in knowledge*, so as to become more assimilated unto him by righteousness, and true holiness ^c. And thus do they hold communion with the *FATHER* of the spirits of all flesh ; or, which the original word doth signify, jointly participate. They have a like nature, though infinitely different as to degrees.

Again, and which obviously follows, they are free to choose out good, in all its possible and just measures ; or such as the renewed mind doth dictate. 'This is by beholding the glory of the LORD, to be changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the spirit of the LORD ^d. Ineffable dignity ! What can be thought of superior to God-like ! and to be made perfect in heaven ! Compared with this all things else are but mere shadows of good.

A further import therefore of the *image* of God in man, must be the *spiritual nature* with which he is *endowed* ; not limited like that of beasts, as to either desire or progression. The more they know, and the better they are, the more ardently they wish, long, and hope to be immortal. 'This is pure *divine inspiration* ! The *seed* of God ^e is incorruptible ! Beyond such an idea of a divine spiritual and everlasting nature, whither can the wide compass of human imagination carry one ?

All that remains, is rightly to improve, by admiring the inestimable favour of OMNIPOTENCE to the human race ; here a palace for them with elegant furniture is made out, but all as

^b Col. iii. 10. ^c Compare Eph. iv. 23. ^d 2 Cor. iii. 18. ^e 1 Peter iv. 23.

nothing to what he may, and should partake of, by a right use of his knowledge, freedom, and spirituality. By means of those, he partakes of heaven, even while upon earth ; and may enjoy it yet more perfectly. Amen.

III. MAN'S DOMINION.

Chap. i. 28. *And GOD blessed them; and GOD said unto them, be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it ; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

BEFORE illustrating the Dominion of our *first Parents*, it may be proper to observe with relation to their origin, as set forth, chap. ii. from verse 18. that the LORD said, whether in himself, or more literally to angels, we know not : It is not good that man should be alone ; I will make him an help meet for him ; and causing a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, he took one of his *ribs*, and closed up the flesh instead thereof ; all which might be so represented to him in a dream. Then forming a *Woman* from thence, *he* brought her to the *man*, who before this, had been made out of dust : And now awaking from this vision of the night, as the book of Job,^a expresses it, *he was naturally enough led thus to speak,* (verse xxiii. of our chapter) *this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh, and shall therefore be called woman.* Hence now, and ever after, such near relations shall live together as one.

How wise and kind the *provision* for mutual delight and improvement ! a kind of *standing law* against abstracting from society upon any pretence whatever ! The gift to *Adam* must have been an inestimable one. The more that *dominion over the earth* is assigned to each, and a sure prospect of posterity : *Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.*

^a Job iv. 13.

As an evidence of superiority, *Adam* had given *names* to every living thing, and these not unlikely importing somewhat either of their natures or use. All are made over to the yet *innocent pair* for possession and benefit; animals, fish, fowls, trees, plants and herbs, Psal. viii. from verse 3. What a sweet paradisaical situation! In the eye of OMNISCIENCE itself, not only good but very good, verse 31.

Still the other *Creatures* were few, but being made in pairs, they would soon increase, from an *instinctive producing principle*. *Herbs, plants and trees* must have been various. The whole form an inheritance quite enrapturing.

A Garden too is provided,^b the precise place of which may not be easy to determine, but from the description altogether captivating. Their employment here was to be a matter of *ease*, or rather *delight*; to dress, and see how nature by God's appointment and power did operate: Transcendent recreation! Idleness is ever loathing to a right state of mind. Here beauties and conveniences together were admirable. No less than four rivers did flow through the *Garden*, and all meet in the middle, making one common broad channel, encompassed with every tree that was pleasant to the *sight*, and *good for food*. How ravishing! Moreover there went up a mist of dew like waters from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground; an *exhalation* rather refreshing, as otherwise, to all the *senses*. The nearer to the above model that human art can go, the more completely beautiful and commodious must every situation be.

What seems adviseable, in places so endearing, is to mingle frequent thoughts of our earthly original, with those leading to *superior enjoyments* still; how the body being formed out of dust,^c by the breath of the ALMIGHTY, man became a living soul; here lies his *distinction*, and herewith he is bound to glorify God. His origin serves at once to *humble and elevate*. To no other *creature* upon earth, is the phrase of a *living soul* applied^d.

^b Chap. ii. 8. ^c Chap. ii. 8. ^d Isa. xlii. 8. Psal. xlix. 12.

From thence forward (by instinctive influence) the fear of a SUPERIOR is continued in beasts of the field, fowls of the air, and fish of the sea, both great and small ; certain of the first of these in extremity will turn upon man, but else, rarely, if ever. . How grateful ought we to be ? How tender of domestic and other animals, which *yield* us much, and with little or no compulsion ? Even when permitted to be slain for food, a gentle manner doth so far evince a right state of heart.

IV. THE FALL OF MAN.

Chap. iii. 3. *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.*

THE History of the fall of Adam and Eve is not without difficulties. Some both pious and learned have recourse to allegory ; holding out, by *emblem*, the *operation of vice* in every age, a freedom not allowed by the greater part. With humility all ought to ponder and judge.

The first thing to be taken notice of, is the *immediate tempter*, namely, a *serpent*, verse 1. said to be then more subtil than any beast of the field. And for as much as it was degraded, verse 14. it would seem that prior to this, it was majestically graceful ; perhaps like a *Seraph*, bright and flaming, from which the name in Hebrew is derived. Also, having wings, it might be playful and amusing. So described Isa. xiv. 29. and in other places of scripture ².

But in our Passage, the difficulty is to know how the *subtil creature* did now speak ; here the *Father of lies*, for a time might obtain leave to make use of the *serpent* as a plausible mean of deluding our first parents. They had received a *positive command not to eat*, and should have waited an equally clear *reversion* thereof. For *trial*, the *malicious spirit* articulates as from the *animal*, and urges the power of that *fruit* which

a Num. xxi. from verse 6.

had been *forbidden* as the obvious cause of so wonderful a change, and eating, it may be, in the intervals of speech. How *arch* a contrivance?

Adam and Eve had no moral precept to transgress, and therefore this of a positive nature was the fittest to be tried with, to show them their subsequent criminality.

Yea, said the envying, malicious spirit, through the playful animal, hath God said, ye shall not eat of this, as well as every other tree of the garden? He but amuses himself with your, as yet weak, infant state of mind. I am made by it, next to instantly wise. Be assured you shall not die, but become, proportionally to your superior order, still more wise and happy than now; for then, as God well knows, your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, or seraphic angels truly, whom I, in outward form, do so manifestly resemble.

Such was the bait, and after a few moments hesitating, and still keeping her eye upon what she saw, that it was so apparently pleasant, and promised also to be no less beneficial, she took of the fruit of the tree she was *forbidden* to pluck from, and did eat. Fatal poison, under a fair external guise!

Divine express authority is trampled upon, as often since, to please the urging pressures of appetite and seduction together. Flight, from horror at an impious speech, would have been her salvation. But to come near, look, parley and touch, was the sure *road to ruin*. She not only took of the fruit herself, but gave unto her husband, and he did eat. Thus fell the earliest parents of mankind; and, in place of multiplying questions, murmurs, and reproaches, we may do better to learn from guilt, and future wretchedness, how to avoid both. Undue curiosity provokes *desire*; desire indulged, leads to seek after what is criminal; and thus has *sin* continued to work through every age^b. Ignorance in some cases is better than knowledge. Check in time whatever tends to *evil*. Live under a deep sense of divine presence and inspection. Keep the heart with all diligence, for out of it are the

^b James i. 14, 15.

issues of *life*^c. Thus watching to pray, the *Devil* himself will fly off. He and all other seducers begin, by lessening *faults* as much as possible. But let conscience, as heard from its throne, regulate.

V. ADAM AND EVE SENTENCED.

Chap. iii. 17. *And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it ; cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.*

ADAM, though last in the transgression, receives the sentence first ; and with great propriety, having rather more of a deliberate nature in it. As to both, we are told, verse 7th, that their eyes were opened ; and they knew from sad consciousness of guilt, that they were naked. Before, like innocent children, they knew not what shame was ; whereas now they felt differently : nor is it needful to inquire how. In their present state, they could *blush and shiver* with cold, which led them to sew, or twist together broad fig leaves, for a covering ; or, as in the margin, to gird about.

And they heard the sound, or voice of emblematical divine majesty, so late their chief good, with terror ; still increasing as it drew near. A change of element, like wind, also might affect them, whence they strove to hide themselves amongst the trees of the garden. A call is made, yet more to arouse them^a. Upon this occasion, there might be somewhat visible, which from want of circumstances, we have it not in our power to describe.

A change of tone no doubt, from soft to severe would be made use of. Where art thou ? Or, as in the case of *Cain*, afterwards^b : What hast thou done ? And he said, I heard thy awful voice in the garden ; and I was afraid. There was

^c Prov. iv. 23. ^a Exod. iii. 4. ^b chap. iv. 10.

some degree of confession though not sufficient. A conscious guilt had led them to hide. Ah, miserable fruit of vice ! To do so, if it had been possible, from infinite beauty and love. A like servile dread, in sober hours, doth still continue ; yea dread of religious fellowship itself : a measure equally foolish as vile. And, not to be informed, but to bring forward what follows, GOD said, Who told thee that thou wast naked, and so forth ? And the man said, the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, gave me of the fruit of that tree, and I did eat. How much better, had he said, I have *sinned* ; what more shall I answer unto thee, O thou *preserver of men*. But he is evasive, and in some sort, like thousands of others since, imputes part at least of his crime to the *one law-giver* himself. The woman, whom thou gavest to be with me for an inseparable companion, she gave me, and I did eat.

Where now were the noble endowments of the first parent of mankind ? What was become of his gratitude ? How dangerous may even the best of all creature-loves be ? But full confession, without palliating, is the surest way to mercy. And the LORD GOD said unto the Woman, what extreme evil is *this* that thou hast done ? She, more direct, said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. A paltry excuse after all, among so many enjoyments. Specious applications ought never to be parleyed with. To fly indignant is the best sign of virtue. Thus have we seen how transgressors, in the end, do mutually accuse ².

Now comes the sentence of condemnation. First, the *serpent*, so lately an animal of much beauty, and captivating playfulness, is doomed, as an employed instrument of the above transgressions, to crawl ; in place of more majestic form. His degradation is that of the very lowest kind. In this creature, we both see and feel how horrible a thing vice is. Nor are many sensual sinners much less degraded still. Their whole sufferings, external and internal, are like dust of the earth to feed upon. Beyond all others, they are the least susceptible of recovery : ever bound down, and unimpressible.

^a Jam. i. from verse 13.

The offspring of her who was first in the offence, will I recover, if any thing can ; and that is intimated, verse 15. I will put enmity between thee, and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed : it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Here is a *dawn of hope*, fulfilled in 1 John. iii. 8 ^b. A fuller knowledge of the whole was left to after ages ; but enough is held out, to keep from despair. The children of the woman, spiritually understood, and those of the serpent, have been, are, and ever will be irreconcilable. One of the most learned Jews applies, as we have now done, these words of promise to *CHRIST* ; and nearly the whole of his followers.

Unto the woman GOD said, as in verse 16, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow in conception and afterwards ; and thy desire shall be subject to thy *husband*, agreeable to the margin, and he shall *rule* over thee, in what is disputable. Humiliating to certain natures ; but a judgement most wise, for the maintenance of domestic ease. A rule in gentleness, and a submission to one head, doth constitute order, harmony and bliss ^c.

And unto *Adam* GOD said, verse 17. Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, in preference to mine, cursed is the ground for thy sake ; in *sorrow* shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life ; in the *sweet* of thy face, from labour, shalt thou eat *bread*, put for every kind of sustenance, till thou return into the *ground* itself ; for *dust* thou art, and unto *dust* shalt thou return. Former self ease has been abused, and the like in all time coming is to be prevented by assiduous labour to both body and mind. Thus too is justice qualified by grace. To eradicate thorns and thistles must prepare the way to what is needful and convenient. In such manner was *man* punished, and then to issue in corporeal death, which last and most tremendous evil, thank GOD, may be happily overcome by all who *believe* in *CHRIST* ^d. So out of real evil GOD educes good, and better still, to infinite perfection.

^b Heb. ii. 14, 15. ^c 1 Peter iii. 1, &c. ^d 2 Tim. i. 9, 10. 1 Cor. xv. from verse 21. also from verse 55. Rom. v. 21.

VI. CAIN AND ABEL.

Chap. iv. 7. *If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*

CONSIDERING the heinous nature of *Cain's guilt*, the words spoken by GOD must be allowed soft and conciliating. But as *Solomon* says ^a, *Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous*; but what can stand before *envy*? It was this last and worst that filled the breast of Cain. Abel we are told, was a *keeper of sheep*, and his brother a *tiller of the ground*, both of them reputable employments. As they grew up to be able for these, understood by some to be signified by *process of time*, verse 3, the two met in some appointed place for religious worship, perhaps towards the conclusion of the year; each of them brought, agreeable to what the LORD had prospered them in, to offer, first fruits and firstlings of the flock, with prayer, praise and thanksgiving; neither of them considered in their own nature as preferable to another.

All advantage seems to have laid in *temper of mind* ^b. By faith *Abel's offering* was more acceptable than *Cain's*, and was marked somehow, by clear *divine approbation* ^c. In the most important of all respects, *Cain's form of worship* was inwardly defective ^d.

For such reasons, the LORD had respect to Abel, and his offering; but unto Cain's he gave no such testimony of respect. As to the manner it is uncertain ^e. The *distinction* was so manifest, as to move in Cain's soul a thought of fell revenge; nor did this ever leave him, till such time as dreadful, unnatural execution took place. He could see nothing in modest Abel, but that of a malicious supplanter, and is set on fire of hell.

Cain was very wroth, verse 5. and his countenance fell, he knit his *brows* in barbarous meditation: Here preventing grace

^a Prov. xxvii. 4. ^b Heb. xi. 4. ^c Exod. xxiii. 16. ^d Jo. iv. 23, 24.
Isaiah lvii. 15. ^e Gen. v. 17. Compare with Lev. iii. 24. Jud. vi. 21.

would have saved him, for thus the LORD was pleased to expostulate, If thou doest well, after all that has so ferociously passed within, shalt thou not by reforming be accepted? Or, as in the margin, have the excellency still that is due to thy birth-right, and amendment. And if thou dost not well, sin lieth couching like a rampant monster at thy door, to avenge; doubt not my goodness to the penitent, yet believe me to be impartial. Stop from the cruel impious purpose of thy heart in time, else yourself shall be your own tormentor.

How amazingly kind is all that! Still however, being of the Devil, through his harboured rough temper he goes on. Cain taking advantage of a good brother's unwariness, *rose up and slew him*. Cursed implacable *envy*? *A brother's blood* now crieth unto GOD from the *ground*: It is heard, and yet he hardens. I know not whom you seek; Am I my *brother's keeper*? *Rage like hell doth haunt him*.

He strives to outbrave the DEITY, and yet cannot; his proud unbent *crest* must be brought down. And now art thou cursed from the *earth*, verse 11, &c. and not difficult to understand, how painful soever to dwell upon. The murderer feels his punishment greater than he can bear. *Furies of imagination* are let loose upon him; and the LORD, with some strange undescribable *stigma*, allows him to live; if ever he become a better man, even innocent,^f crying blood might have been got over.

VII. E N O C H.

Chap. v. 24. *And Enoch walked with GOD, and he was not: for GOD took him.*

A *Fugitive and a Vagabond Cain* was made, though marked some how or other, that none should put him to death. East of *Eden* he chose to settle, and had posterity, but not renowned for *worth*. In the room of Abel was born to the earliest parents of mankind, Seth, an appointed blessing,

^f 1 Jo. iii. 4, &c.

as his name would seem to import; and in his days ^a men began to call upon the MOST HIGH GOD; or according to others, and agreeable to the margin, to call themselves by *the name of the LORD*; either way, to worship in a solemn and public manner.

The posterity of Cain neglecting this, appear soon to have become first ignorant, and then idolaters. The *Sun*, from reasons easy to conceive, became their chief object, and long continued to be. Between the *Sethites* and *Cainites* there soon arose out of this, a clear distinction. From total want of worship, or what was *grossly erroneous*, did proceed another great crime, of multiplying *wives* at pleasure; both together, and living now in cities, *vice* did rapidly spread. Houses too were ornamented, and led to the invention of several arts, as working in brass, iron, and so forth, in themselves far from blameable, unless when misapplied.

Enoch, a seventh from Adam, and descendent of pious Seth, was a person of signal excellence, and a *prophet* ^b. Not unlikely, among the judgments he denounced was that of the *flood*; since his son's name was Methuselah, thought to signify *water-destruction*. With the advantage of Heb. xi. 5. we may assure ourselves that he was *translated to heaven*, and in early comparative life with most of those around him ^c.

He thus escaped formidable temptations, and no less formidable sorrows from the guilt of others. Thus likewise, even as Abel and Enoch, early departing of the good, do bear witness to the certainty of a far better and more enduring substance.

When Enoch is said to have walked with God, it imports, besides a distinct knowledge, a kind of *familiarity* with him in *worship*; and that in the tenor of his life, he acted as seeing Him who is *invisible*. Hence his obedience would be universal, growing, and steadfast unto death, or translation, which was still better.

The *ignorant* are far off from God, and an easy prey to almost every tempter; they are therefore in an *enlightened coun-*

^a Chap. iv. 26,

^b Jude xiv. 15.

^c Eccles. xliv. 16, &c.

try, the prime objects of final *vengeance*^d. *Faith*, in exercise, is a lively, glorious, effectual principle; it substantiates evidence to the mind, and overcomes the most awful obstacles^e. A habit of devotion is the very soul of such virtue; it is like what breathing itself is to animal nature, their glory and life.

Such are in GOD, and GOD in them. How fit for heaven! Pleasant, easy, and useful ground of hope! What gilds the moments of affliction may account often for early deaths^f!

VIII. ANTEDILUVIAN WICKEDNESS.

Chap. vi. 5. *And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

THIS chapter, though short in its narrative, takes in a large compass of time, and has not a few difficulties. Their solution however is not momentous. How immaterial, for example, who the daughters of men were? verse 2. Whether, as is most probable, the descendants of Cain or not. From their *fairness* of complexion, and beauty of *form*, a better educated set of people were ensnared; let none be high minded, even those in comparison like sons of God.

The expression of their taking them wives would seem to hold out an additional crime of polygamy, to that of unequal intermarrying^h. A source of unavoidable disturbance. *Giants*, then produced, are understood by some literally, though others reduce their size and strength to that of mere nobility, who are but too soon tempted to domineer, as a way to renown. Their vices, be they ever so great, spread by *imitation*; so do even their desires and purposes of evil, as in the margin; a dreadful picture!

When the supreme invariable LORD is said to repent, this cannot be understood according to the letter, but in the way

d 2 Thes. i. 7, &c. John iii. 19, &c. Heb. viii. 10.
 e 1 John v. 4. Compare with this Heb. xi. throughout. f Rom. viii. 17.
 g 1 John ii. 17. Heb. xi. 13, &c. h Chap. iv. 19.

of accommodation to human feelings; when they, from what is painful, change their measures of practice ^b. So God determined to act as men do, when they grieve from disappointment. Thus the divine displeasure is strongly marked.

And the LORD said, in his own mind, I will destroy man from the face of the earth, and all that he is connected with. He would not always continue to strive with them. And yet, as a father, he would spare for a time, and warn by his servant *Noah*, even for one hundred and twenty years.

What merits particular consideration is, the progress of vice, for most part, to its last ruinous issues. No one of a sudden doth harden ^c. Sensual transgressors are most of all in danger ^d.

Honourable marriage is the provision of pure omnipotent love; taking its rise from respect to good understanding, and virtue ^e.

Exemplary wickedness in high place is one of the surest symptoms of *national overthrow* ^f. Violence and oppression are native fruits of ungodliness ^g.

IX. NOAH.

Chap. vi. 9. — *Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generations; and Noah walked with GOD.*

THE high character here given to *Noah* is the more remarkable, that he lived in an *age* and *place* of universal profligacy, verse 5. He was true to social and relative duties; perfect or sincere as in the sight of GOD; far beyond that, human excellence cannot be carried. His sense of divine presence and inspection was close maintained by devout exercise.

Thus with his *family*, standing next to single, he is made choice of, by infinite wisdom, to be a *preacher of righteousness*; he is also instructed, verse 14. to make a large ark, with rooms in it, and to have it so thoroughly *pitched*, as to keep out even

b Jam. i. 17.

c Psal. i. 1, 2.

d 1 Peter ii. 11.

e 1 Peter iii. 1, &c.

f Psal. xii. ult.

g Psal. xii. 1.

heavy pressures of water. The time taken up with this must have been considerable, and all that time he did certify an approaching *deluge*, against the impenitent ^a.

The extraction of *rosin*, whence *tar* is produced, could be no difficult process; there was also a natural production in that part of the world, no less *glutinous* than pitch, termed *bitumen*, by means of which the high walls of Babylon were built; the *cabins* of different sizes would serve to strengthen the whole.

As to *dimensions*, it is only needful to observe, that each cubit was the length of a man's arm, nighest to a foot and a half; Others understand this measure to be geometrically understood, and not much less than three fourths larger, more than enough to answer all *demands*.

A *window*, it follows for light to each apartment, and of different sizes shalt thou make, and in a *cubit cover* shalt thou finish all of them. When there was a necessity for looking about, as in chap. viii. 13. the covering might easily be removed, being held to the rest by proper hooks. The door of the *ark* was most fitly placed in the side; three *stories* did comprehend the whole building: the lower for *beasts* probably; *birds* in that above; and the upper for *Noah* and his *Family*, and *food*. As for *creeping things*, they might live between the lowest story, and the strong *pitched bottom*. It has been made out to *demonstration*, that the space as above set forth, was quite sufficient. Upon this point, however, the *curious* must be referred to larger works. Two only of the *unclean animals* were taken in ^b; seven of the other kind for preservation and food. Of *fowls* it may be observed, from exact naturalists, there are not above five hundred that differ. Of *beasts* with *serpents*, exclusive of what with *fishes*, could live in water, no more than one hundred and fifty. As for huge *creatures*, they are but few; and even the more voracious of them from confinement would lose of their keen appetite. An impulse of the DEITY must account for their approach to the Ark, and coming in.

^a Heb. xi. 7. 1 Peter iii. 19, 20.

^b Chap. vii. 2.

Thus

Thus by *faith* ^c, Noah being warned of God, and moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his *house*, by which he condemned the ancient world, and became an *heir* of righteousness; he did according to all that was commanded him. An illustrious and truly heroic character! Prime source of the DIVINE favour; especially when days are evil. How tremendous in the end, is God's justice upon the impenitent? The longer sentence is delayed, the more fearful when executed ^d. This *awful example* is witnessed unto, in most parts of the earth, by signs of a deluge, as well as next to *universal tradition*. Still *sea shells*, and *bones of large animals* are found in the highest mountains.—To him who doeth great wonders and unsearchable, be glory!

X. THE FLOOD.

Chap. vii. 7. *And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the Ark, because of the waters of the flood.*

THE person here named was eighth from Adam, in a direct line; his family, as became a good man, had been well educated; and, as usually happens, with success ^a. In the currency of his six hundredth year, the *flood of waters* did commence, after he, with his highest relatives, did betake themselves to the ark, and other divine appointments were obeyed. There went in two and two of each *inferior creature*, likewise by an over-ruling DIVINE impulse.

And on the *seventh day*, or next after, the waters, as foretold, verse 4. began to fall. Then too were the *fountains of the great deep broken up* ^b. These and the sea meeting, would make a rapid increase. Under-ground waters are still undeniable.

The *windows of Heaven* mark a prodigious effusion, not in drops, but as from buckets. *Water spouts* at sea may help to form an idea of this; they are more like floodgates than any thing else.

^c Heb. xi. 7.

^d 2 Peter ii. 1, &c.

^a Prov. xxii. 6.

^b Psal. xxiv. 2.

And thus did cataracts, with inundations of horror, continue for the space of forty days, verse xii. 17. Then was the ark itself lifted up; the LORD JEHOVAH till then securing all. Soon after, it rested from a *gentle agitation*, which Noah could not well mistake the meaning of. He sent forth a *raven*, and then a *dove* more than once; from the last of which, bearing a new plucked *olive branch*, he knew the waters were abated.

Thus were he and his family saved, whilst all *flesh*, out of the ark died. The accompanying effects of subterraneous eruptions, might hasten this ^c.

XI. RESTING OF THE ARK.

Chap. viii. 4. *And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.*

THE mountains of Ararat, are understood, by the greater part of good writers, to be that lofty ridge which runs through Armenia and Mesopotamia, whence do originate the two well known rivers of *Euphrates and Tigris*.

And God, all-gracious, spake unto *Noah*, who might be still hesitating, and said, Go forth of the ark, thou and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Next, the brute creatures are taken care of, which affords an useful lesson of gentleness. His own freedom and their's, in fresh air, and one of the finest climates of the world, would be ravishing, even to the extended period of six hundred and one. Moses, who lived about eight hundred years after the Flood, and who writes this *sacred book*, must have had such an amazing event in distinct recollection. *Shem*, who saw it, was contemporary with Abraham, as he again was with Jacob, whose great-grand-child was the father of him who wrote. Few means of authenticity can well compare with this.

He now came to a pleasant, grateful exercise, with benefits as usual arising from it. And *Noah*, verse 20th, builded an altar unto the LORD, and presented what he did suppose, from

ancient custom, would be most acceptable. It really was so, being accompanied with thankful praise. The origin of sacrifices has been a matter of much dispute, and is not easy to fix. The fact however is, that unless from pious motives, and operating virtuous manners, they never have been of use to the worshipper ^a.

Noah and his relatives were devout at heart, thankful and ardent. Hence, in a form of speech taken from men, the LORD, verse 21st smelled a sweet savour, and said in his heart, or did declare his settled purpose, not again to curse the earth for man's sake ; nor any more on his account, to smite every living thing ; but to continue the seasons in their courses to the end of time. Delightful vicissitudes ! and shews how much with him mercy rejoiceth over judgement.

Pious praise for past favours is peculiarly acceptable ^b. Go with the smiling spring, and open with other plants, in buds of joy to heaven ; so shall the other seasons pass with like pleasant gratitude, enflaming all sorts of good.

XII. GOD'S COVENANT WITH NOAH.

Chap. ix. 8, 9. *And GOD spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, and I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.*

THE gratitude of a pious family, as before set forth, obtains an immediate divine blessing ; a grant of fruitfulness, as at the beginning ; dominion and assurance of future safety from such another judgement as they had borne witness unto. Perhaps their power over animals for food was more enlarged than in times past. Only one restriction, for mercy's sake, eating flesh with the life, or blood in it raw and warm.

A lesson of obvious tenderness to one another. If cruel to a beast, men will soon become objects. The righteous are merciful to both. Human safety is also provided for at the expence of animals let loose to gore or bite. Hence owners are led to beware, and others to be careful of themselves. Divine

^a John iv. 23, 24. Isa. i. from verse 11. and Micah vi. 6, &c. ^b Psal. v. 2.
love

love foresees and reaches its protection to the utmost, without encroachment upon liberty. That all are brethren is a benign thought, and, as one would suppose, impells to mutual kind regards.

A bow in the cloud, is made a beautiful *covenant pledge* of subsequent safety. GOD needs no remembrancer, but here speaks after the manner of men, with great condescension. To make a simple promise would have been great, but to give a sign, and to engage by covenant is goodness unspeakable.

Men of *leisure and piety* have introduced much speculation upon the above, but to follow them would require us to enlarge too much. For a *covenant and token*, let us be grateful. Looking upon the *bow*, as an attractive summary of all that is beautiful in colouring, we should admire and praise. *Faith* ought to rise with every new sight, and high philosophy should be called in to religion's aid. Then rapturous silence will best make the praise, that will not, cannot as yet be spoken ^a. Let the stance of beholders be where they may, their own seems still to be the middle. See and trust GOD as in this, so in every promise ^b.

XIII. ORIGIN OF ANCIENT NATIONS.

Chap. x. 1. *Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; and unto them were sons born after the flood.*

IT has been well observed by the learned, in opposition to infidels, that though this whole tenth chapter contains little more than names, yet it is the richest quarry for finding out the *origin of ancient nations* that is to be met with in all the world, and hereby demonstrates the *great age of Mosaic history*.

Though *Shem* be the first mentioned, he was not so old as *Japheth*. His preference might be from the attachment of himself and his posterity in general, to the *belief and worship* of

^a Eccl. iv. 3. from verse 11. ^b Jer. xxxviii. 25, 26. Luke i. 32. and
ii. 10, 11. Heb. viii. 10. Dan. vii. 13, 14. 1 Cor. xv. 28.

one God. *Japheth* or *Japetus*, seems to have been owned by the *Greeks*, as their father or head. Two of his seven sons *Gomer* and *Togarmah* are spoken of *Ezek.* xxxviii. 6. so as to fix their situation where the *Scythians* afterwards dwelt ^a. Probably *Magog* too was nigh them.

From *Madai* came the *Midianites*, a little more eastwards. *Javan* fixed west towards the *Ionian sea*. From them sprung *Alexander*, most improperly styled the *Great* ^b. *Tubal* and *Meshech*, from their nearness probably, gave name to the *Moschi*, north-east of *Cappadocia*.

Tiras or *Thuras*, sounds like *Thrace*, an early seat of religious worshippers, and which gave a Greek appellation to it. *Ashkenaz*, upon the Bay of *Ascanius* in *Bithynia*. *Elisha* inhabited *Elis* of *Peleponnesus*. *Tarshish*, denoting the utmost limits, or *Iberi*, understood by most of *Spain*; a people much traded with by the *Phœnicians*. *Kittim* did people *Italy*, where was a great city by *Keha* ^c. *Dodanim*, or *Rhodanim*, might settle in and about the isle of *Rhodes*. Hence the great river *Rhodonus*, or *Rhone*. Thus too, anciently was *Marseilles* named.

The *Isles of the Gentiles*, signifying a multitude, might have much sea, though not encompassed. They appear to have been of different nations.

There is less certainty as to the descendants of *Hami*, the second son of *Noah*. From *Cush* might come those of *Cashon* in *Arabia*. According to others the *Cushites* of *Ethiopia*, south of his father *Ham*, in *Egypt*; where was afterwards, the idol *Jupiter Hammon*. Part of *Upper Egypt* is yet styled by the *Arabs*, *Meser*. *Phut* might have another share, named anciently *Putea*; and bordering upon the vast *Atlantic*. *Canaan* did plant the land of that name, which became so grossly idolatrous.

The *Shubites* lived nigh to the *Persian sea*; and were considerable traders. One of *Cush's* descendants was *Nimrod*, verse 8. robust hunters, and soon given to war. The name god, added to certain persons or things, denotes the *superlative*, as here ^d. Let the above suffice to vindicate our

^a Compare *Chap.* xxvii. 14.

^b *Dan.* viii. 21.

^c *Dion. Hal. Plutarch,* 1 *Chron.* i. 7.

^d *Jonah* iii. 3. *Acts* vii. 20.

tenth chapter. To him who determines the bounds and habitation of mankind, be glory, honour and praise.

XIV. CONFUSION OF TONGUES.

Chap. xi. 7. *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

FOR some time after the *flood*, the whole people of the earth was of one language; denominated *lip*, in the margin, from being one chief instrument of speech; not unlikely that of *Adam and Eve*, and understood by most of the Jews, to have been *Hebrew*, but not certain^a.

In that chapter from whence the text is taken, verse 2d, we read, that a number of Noah's family journeyed eastward; or, according to others, from the east, and came to a plain, in the *land of Shinar*, beautiful, and to appearance highly productive.

There they dwelt for a while, where their number did much increase. What seems most probable is, that *Shinar* lay between the two celebrated rivers of *Tigris* and *Euphrates*, and which afterwards, from this circumstance, went by the name of *Mesopotamia*. When our colony had lived some time, in much peace and plenty, they appear to have grown sick of ease, and perhaps worse. They stirred up one another to make brick of a large size for building; and for which there they had good materials, to supply the want of stone; and which last, besides being rare, in a plain so extensive, might not be thought so durable.

What they had to make use of for *mortar*, or *lime* with us, was a kind of mud, which when exposed to the air, grew hard as the brick itself, the common name thereof was *bitumen*. Our history next informs us, that with materials so abundant, and of so easy purchase, they would have no less than a city, and tower in it, of ever memorable loftiness, like what would

^a Chapter x. 5, and 20.

seem to touch the heavens ; and both, as a *certain mean*, in their opinion, to prevent being scattered.

In this there was a mixture of pride with impiety. They knew that the design of *Omnipotent love* was to cover the earth with inhabitants ; and that beyond a certain number, in one place, there could be no regular government.

Thus were they to live *uncountable*, and in a kind of *fortress* not to be conquered. From thence there would be a temptation to idolatrous worship ^c. At all events their vanity was arrogant. True honour follows, without being *hunted* for ^c.

It is to be feared, they already began to forget God, in his marvellous instrument the *Sun*. The very lessening of their number in that place, was an immediate part of their punishment ^d.

And the LORD, speaking after the manner of men, as ourselves still would do with children, *came down*, in effect to reckon with them, the sole import of verse 5 ; and in Himself did determine, the same as said, to frustrate the proud and impious execution. He speaks in his own breast, as Majesty is well known to do, Let us, in place of I will ; and alluding to their foregoing proud language, Go to, *let us build*. And with more speed would he stop what they had so vainly begun, by confounding their *languages*, so as to render them useless in working to one another.

How easy a matter this with infinite power ! and yet how wonderful ! It may be added, how gracious upon the whole to mankind ! Hence did separation, or scattering of the *builders* unavoidably take place ; and each carry their own language into a different part, though a few, known to one another, by some kind of similarity, might conjoin.

The proud aim of the *multitude* was broken, by the loss of one common *bond*. Here is *judgment*, as before taken notice of, mixed with much *mercy* ; out of real evil, good is educed ; no less than *re-peopling the earth*, with much more speed than otherwise. Pride too is checked, and a *lesson* given, that a *vice* so pestive was not made for man. Further, the *ambitious*

^b Deut. i. 28, 29.

^c Isa. lxiii. 2.

^d Prov. x. 24.

through all ages, ought to stand in awe ^c. Let the privilege of speech have our admiration, as what keeps mankind together, and gives glory to GOD. At no time to be debased, by what is either impure or impious; it is truly honourable, when employed in *divine worship*, and *mutual edification*. Plurality of languages leads to endearments both at *home and abroad*. Study and usefulness are promoted at once. Memorials of this *event* are to be met with in many ancient authors.

PART SECOND.

FROM THE CALL OF ABRAHAM TILL JACOB'S JOURNEY INTO EGYPT.

I. TERAH AND ABRAM CALLED.

Chap. xi. 27. *Now these are the generations of Terah : Terah begat Abram, Nabor, and Haran ; and Haran begat Lot.*

THE posterity of Seth, in a direct line, is begun from verse 10. and they have this honour done to them, from their general *steadfast regard to true religion*, when those of Ham and Japhet became apostates. Terah the father of Abram, indeed was not quite sound in *principle*, but hurt by surrounding temptation; yet there was some good thing in him. An object of *special DIVINE favour*, and his son was yet more hopeful. Therefore, as soon as he, and his nearest relatives could travel, this *friend of GOD* had a call to leave his native

^c Phil. iv. 8.

country,

country, for subsequent high privileges. It was what he understood in part, though the scripture account is general.

Abram obeyed, and first by way of rest, he and they who were with him, put up at Haran, verse 32. where *Terah* died. The wife of our renowned Patriarch was *Sarai*, his eldest brother's daughter, and *sister to Lot*, verse 27. Perhaps from the time of his son's call, *Terah* had given up with various *Chaldaic superstitions*, like those afterwards spoken of ^a.

Now then begins quite a *new Epoch or Æra* of Jewish History. From Haran, Abram is next called to a country that should be shewn to him ^b. A *relation* after this takes place more large than before, as specially interesting to the *Hebrew nation*. How the LORD JEHOVAH spoke is not certain, but it must have been in a way far from dubious or equivocal. He is assured to become head of a *great people*, and that till then frequent familiar *Divine intercourses* might be expected.

Here commenced the promise of one, in whom all the *families* of the earth were to be blessed, that is CHRIST. To remove from his earliest intimate connections, and out of pure spiritual motives, required signal faith and resolution. Hence is most justly celebrated ^c. The more strength of belief did Abram exercise, that all this while *Sarai* had been *barren*, and did thus long continue.

The *promise of MESSIAH* made to him, as the Father of the Faithful, and the Friend of God, was before the distinguishing covenant rite of circumcision was appointed, by way of *evidence* to both Jew and Gentile afterwards.

The illustrious patriarch now proceeds from *Haran*, towards *Canaan* ^d, distant no less than three hundred miles; the country unknown, and all along as a sojourner; he had likewise a large *desart of Palmyra* to pass through, mountains also were in his way, as *Libanus, Hermon and Gilead*. Lot's love, if he understood not himself to be comprehended in Abram's call, was singularly tender. Their number and substance both, had by this time increased considerably.

^a Dan. ii. 10. iv. 7. Jos. xxiv. 2. Compared with Gen. xxvii. 43. ---chap. xxiv. 31. ^b Chap. xii. 1, &c. ^c Heb. xi. 8. ^d Acts vii. 4.

Coming into the *land of Canaan*, they reach *Sichem*, a plain with a beautiful grove of oaks ^e.

The *Canaanites*, named from *Canaan*, were a people fierce and inhospitable, whence a new manifestation was made by the LORD to Abram; repeating the promise of that very *land* unto him, in his posterity; upon which, in pious gratitude, he builded an altar, and did worship. Removing from thence to a mountain on the East of Bethel, he avoided for the present any contest. The time of full possession was not yet come ^f.

Here again, ever grateful, he built another altar for *thanksgiving sacrifice*; and where he next pitched, west of Bethel, and east of Hai, a third ^g. *Social Religious Duties* are founded in nature; and the more influence that people have, the more these are binding upon them.

Abram going on still towards the south, under implored DIVINE direction, escapes from the hands of a barbarous people in some good measure.

II. ABRAM IN EGYPT.

Chap. xii. 10. *And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.*

THE best of human characters are not perfect. Abram hitherto has shone illustrious, but now his *virtue* is brought under a sore *trial*. Want of *food* obliges him to go into Egypt, and Sarai, though somewhat advanced in life, is still *fair*. On that account, he becomes apprehensive that he might suffer death, if she passed not for his sister; and in fact, conceives the design of doing so: if not a *lie*, by being his brother's daughter, yet meant for certain to mislead the people.

There is no *vindication* of our patriarch here; and he had done much better to have trusted God. He had himself

^e Compare Chap. xiii. 18.

^f Compare Chap. xvii. 6.---xxi. 16.

^g Compare Josh. xxiv. 1, 25.

transgressed

transgressed in part, and now put his wife's *virtue* into danger ; for we cannot rest in his explanation, Chap. xx. 12. To own, at once his crime, to a certain degree, is safest, and to praise the truth of our sacred historian.

Being thus tempted, he meets with compassion from his **MAKER** ; and it belongs to all who read, that they trust not in their own wisdom ; but, in well-doing, commit themselves to **OMNIPOTENT love**.

Egypt was a low lying country, compared to Canaan, and therefore Abram is said to have gone down for sojourning, and not to dwell. The people of that *land* beheld Sarai with admiration, and went so far as to inform Pharaoh their chief of her, who during some space entreated Abram well ^a. However, meditating what he ought not, it pleased GOD to interpose after a *miraculous manner*.

A disorder so generally inflicted, came unavoidably to be spoken of among the *Egyptians*. Pharaoh in particular understood the cause, and made manifest an excellent disposition. He called Abram, and said, why didst thou not tell me that she was thy *wife* ? And a good deal more to the like purpose. Take her and go thy way. Then, well guarded and loaded with *royal gifts*, he and all his people made their departure.

Here was true greatness of mind ! Sarai might be the first in confessing what she was ; but once in a *King's* power was not a little hazardous. Even as Abram now had just cause to be ashamed, we may hope that he sought forgiveness, and was accepted. Let those who think that they stand, take heed lest they fall ^b. Better had it been for Abram, that his *life* had gone, than his *virtue hurt*. Uprightness while here, is what *Heaven* looks for, and not *perfection* ^c.

Good looks are often a special trial to *female excellence*. Suspicious places and persons such ought ever to *dread*. Care of GOD still, next to miraculous, if not altogether so, may be expected by the *devoutly cautious* ^d.

^a See Verse 16. ^b Prov. xxviii. 14. ^c Psal. lxxxiv. 11.---xix. 12, 13. Isa. lv. 7.---lvii. 15. ^d Heb. xiii. 6.---vi. 10.

III. ABRAM AND LOT.

Chap. xiii. 5. *And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.*

ABRAM, and all who went down with him into Egypt, were made rich by the King in cattle, and in silver, and in gold. Proceeding northward from thence, they went to Bethel, a place before well known to them, as worshippers^a.

From the time of their abode here, Abram and Lot did much increase, as to *flocks, herds and tents*; which last, as sojourners, they still made use of. By God's blessing implored in this his house, as the name Bethel imports, the land in time was not able to bear them; so that their *servants* did frequently differ because of the cattle and grounds to feed upon. Their *enemies* likewise in the neighbourhood took an advantage of this. *Wealth* has its trials, often from envy and discord^b. Where *servants* are officious, *masters* are apt to be misled. Few things argue more prudence, than to leave off strife in its beginning. Thus did Abram and Lot.

Let there be no *strife*, verse 8. *I pray thee, between me and thee, &c.* So spake the elder to the younger^c. Blessed devout Peace Maker! A sure sign of other admirable worth. How conciliating! It is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression. *Brethren*, in particular, ought not to fall out.

Is not, said the mild patriarch, verse 9, the whole land before thee? And so forth. Take thy choice of room in it; as we must separate, let it be with quietness; if thou wilt take the left, then I will take the right, &c.^d After all this generous condescension, it was wisely agreed, that they should live as nigh as might be to one another for mutual advantage.

Lot beheld the sweet plain, watered by *Jordan*, fruitful and pleasant, and made choice thereof. A choice which he and his family afterwards had much cause to repent. If he had

^a Chap. xii. 9. ^b Prov. xv. 17. Psal. xxxvii. 16. ^c See 1 Tim. ii. 8.

^d 1 Peter v. 5.

got any information of the wicked neighbourhood, he was much to blame, preferring selfishness to virtue. His conduct may be extenuated, from want of experience.

Abram continued nigh to Bethel, in the land of Canaan. Let us revere his piety, his love of *peace*, and mild brotherly affection : A most useful character to contemplate ! Not perfect, yet illustrious.

IV. ABRAM RESCUETH LOT.

Chap. xiv. 14. *And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued them unto Dan.*

WE are now to consider Abram as a man of courage ; and most suitable to his religious belief. Three petty princes, called in these early ages *Kings*, did combine to war against Bera, King of Sodom, and his neighbour King of Gomorrah, and Shinab King of Admah, and a fourth of Zeboim, and a fifth of Bela or Zoar. Twelve years they had been tributaries, and seem to have been much oppressed. Now they make a stand, and are conquered.

Lot, among others, did suffer both in his person and goods, though as a sojourner, he had no immediate hand in the war. From natural generous affection to his brother's son, Abram was brought to fight. With a few confederates, he armed his servants, and led them out to *battle*, in number not much above three hundred. By a pursuit of the conquerors, quick and silent as might be, he overtook and rescued the spoil from them. His *art* was equal to his *courage*, for the whole was done without much molestation to his small army. Perhaps, too, the adversaries might have intoxicated themselves with the rich *wines of Sodom*.

Thence the *prudent hero* returns with his beloved *nephew Lot*, and all of his goods which had not been wasted. Being met by the King of Sodom, who had some how made his escape, and by *Melchizedek*, both king and priest, they congratulate him.

him. The last of these brought to Abram, by his servants, bread and wine; and blessed him in name of the MOST HIGH GOD. Much is said of this eminent person^a. In particular, that Abram gave unto him a tenth part of all. Having had no *father* of priestly order, nor a *mother* in that connection, nor entered upon office at the usual time of *Jewish Priests* afterward, nor end of time to his service. His *regal priesthood* was very similar to that of our *Blessed LORD*.

The custom of *tything* spoils of war for pious uses, seems to have been of great antiquity. Spiritual acknowledgements are still more acceptable. Abram most generously refuses to take the least part of the King of Sodom's recovered property. Magnanimous in both! The *warrior* sees himself to be no other than a *divine instrument*; and whose heart was much above the world^c. His not offering payment of what the young men had lived upon, is likewise beautifully polite. Much there is to admire, much to imitate.

V. GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAM.

Chap. xv. 5. *And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.*

ABRAM, as a prime favourite of heaven, had various divine appearances made to him; sometimes in one way, and sometimes in another; but all of them clear, impressive, and termed by the ancient Jews, *Shechina*. After his victory over Chedarlaomer, the word of the LORD came unto him in a vision, prefaced by a caution not to be affraid, probably by the sudden splendour which did accompany it; for I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. One of the most learned Hebrews tells us, that in cases of this sort, all the bodily senses were bound up, and only the ima-

^a Heb. chap. vii.

^c See Phil. iv. 8.

gination exercised ^a. So some have endeavoured to explain our blessed LORD's temptation in the wilderness. Every one in matters of this sort ought to exercise his own best judgement, and allow the same to others.

To what Abram well understood, he makes this return, rather it may be thought too bold, that being childless, his wealth was of small account to him. His heir, to all appearance must be the steward of his house. Thus, though not in direct terms, does he request a Son, and, meeting with no check, he is more explicit afterwards. Besides parental inclination, he had in view, no doubt, the fulfilling of former engagements made to him ^b.

As yet Sarai had never brought forth, and the faith of each, by this means had been long tried. He obtains now a clearer promise than ever, of one from himself to become an *eminent heir*, and all in language of the most condescending nature.

Abram believed, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. He sets aside all doubts, and trusts in the *Most High God*. Still, as in his case, a chief mean of Christian justification, in room of a perfect obedience ^c.

Clearer marks of justification are all allowed, by the example of Abram, verse 8. to seek after. Misgivings of mind are watchfully to be guarded against, whilst new aids may be modestly sought ^d.

Thus, too, was Abram rewarded, from verse 9th of our chapter ^e. The heirs from Abram's body were to be sore and long tried in Egypt, before they should be brought into full possession of *Canaan*.

Awaking from the horrors of a dream, the LORD made a covenant with Abram; ascertaining the inheritance to his offspring, by *Isaac*. What God sovereignly determines, he is said to do. Hence observe the amazing goodness of God to his pious children. He does not merely promise, but enters into *covenant* with them ^f. A sacrifice of slain beasts

^a Acts ix. from verse 9.

^b Chap. xi. 2, 3.

^c Rom. iii. 22.

James. ii. 21, 22.

^d Jude vi. 37.

^e Dan. x. 8.

^f Heb. vi. 13.

was but like the shadow of better things to come by JESUS CHRIST, whose sacrifice was given from pure love.

VI. SARAI IMPATIENT AND PUNISHED.

Chap. xvi. 6. — *And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.*

MUCH caution ought to go along with the perusal of ancient history. The world has had its infant state, and manners ^a. Such then as were criminal might escape with less punishment than since. The young and sceptically disposed should attend to this, and pity rather than ridicule, or imitate.

Sarai, fond to have the name of a mother, by a child from her husband, desires what was unjustifiable, and likewise obtains his consent. So far their faith became weaker than before, in opposition to a late *solemn covenant* ^b.

Her Egyptian maid, we may be next to certain, was become a believer in one only the living and true GOD; and hence the idea of *cohabitation* might the more easily be regarded. The mistress however is impatient, and is soon corrected for it, by contempt from her servant. An instructive permission to avoid unequal familiarities.

Abram is still too indulgent to a prime mover in the whole bad business; behold thy hand-maid is in thy hand, and so forth. By far too rash; for Hagar, as a slave, it is probable might be misled. Illicit love is fruitful of evil. Polygamy is ruinous to peace. The near equality of the sexes, as to numbers, doth not admit of it: nor is increase of the human species a just pretext. By observing the prime order of heaven, numbers with peace and virtuous education are best carried on.

What better could Hagar do, when hardly dealt with, but fly? Oppression next to stupifies the mind. She sat down by

^a Gal. iv. 1, &c.

^b Gen. xv. 4.

a fountain, difficult to be met with often in these warm regions. Here a benevolent angel receives commission to counsel her ^c. Hagar meant to go by the way of Shur, into the *land of Egypt*; where, amidst idolaters, both principle and practice might have suffered much. The mild messenger of heaven doth courteously address the sorrowful sojourner. She makes him a like gentle return, assigning the true and pitiable cause. The angel, in human form, exhorts her to go back. Order is one chief law of heaven, and whilst imperfect creatures live together, there must be mutual forbearance. Other, and more devout arguments still he might make use of.

Let us lament the frequency and danger of irregular fleshly lusts; also of haste and want of submission to the will of God ^d. Licentiousness in marriage is aggravated by downright perjury ^e. Conciliating purity with love are great ornaments of married life ^f.

VII. ISHMAEL.

Chap. xvi. 11. *And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.*

OBJECTS of imaginary pleasure do not always answer expectation. Sarai, in this way was justly punished. Hagar presumes too much, and Ishmael afterwards follows her example. Abram, between love and justice, finds it likewise difficult to act.

Though the angel of God did not unfold at first his mission to a hard used servant, he has leave, it would seem, to let her know, that the child she had now to bear would have a numerous offspring; and, on many accounts be very remarkable. That his name should be called Ishmael, which signifies, as at present was the case, *GOD doth hear*.

Herself too, was to be a partaker in the promise made to

^c Heb. i. 14.

^d 1 Peter ii. 11.

Rom. viii. 5, &c.

^e Mal. iii. 6.

Zech. v. 1, &c.

Rev. xxi. 8. 27.

^f 1 Peter iii. 1, &c.

Tit. ii. 9, 10.

Abram ^a. What she was soon to produce, would be next to certain evidence of the whole. His amazing increase, styled *Hagarians*, was quite remarkable. As also in the *Nabatheans*, from his son *Nebajoth*; and in the *Shureans*, from his son *Shur*. Whence, afterwards came the *Arabs*, *Scenites*, or tent-dwellers; and last of all, the well known modern *Saracens*: the most of them, through fraud and force together, now followers of *Mahomet*. And, at least a thirtieth part of those who inhabit our globe.

Still they believe in one only true God, with the more ancient Jews, and us that are Christians; whence through time, they may become instrumental means of propagating the gospel, in its original simplicity. Be this as it may, the prediction, in verse 12. is wonderful, and the fulfilment thereof hitherto no less so; and he shall be a wild man, alluding as appears from the margin, to the ass thus named, one of the least tameable animals upon earth ^b. A just similitude, whereby to represent the *Arabs*, the descendants of *Ishmael* ^c. What follows in our narrative is still more remarkable; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him: a description of next to universal, and long continued hostilities. A nation to come forth of his bowels, that should not be dispossessed as most others. And the fact as yet, has been answerable; for they have never been conquered. This amazing circumstance might be illustrated at large, and has been so undeniably. They are a sort of robbers by land, and pirates by sea; their territory being very extensive. If beat for a while in one place, they easily fly to another; yet never as a people out of Arabia, though this attempt has been made by the most powerful potentates in and about their neighbourhood.

Travellers even now may pass through their country by permission sought; or in strong armed bands, styled *Caravans*. If by permission, they are found faithful to a certain engaged for extent, but no further. The same in further

^a Chap. xv. 5.

^b Job xxxix. 5, &c.

Gen. xxi. 20.

process, after that, they will plunder ; justifying their conduct, by the ancient bad usage of their father Ishmael.

The grounds they claim reach from Havilah near Babylon, to Shur, bordering upon Egypt ; and still the greater part maintained, after so many thousand years. Besides other engagements in war with other descendants from Abram, by Isaac, Jacob, and Esau ; and all without conquering them. The same we are assured of, by heathen historians, as to other more distant and powerful kings. Greece and Rome, when in their greatest strength, did sometimes make them bow, but could never break : astonishing completion of our text.

Still they retain the hostile manners of Ishmael their head ; they live wild, for most part in tents, and are circumcised as he was, at the age of thirteen. As a reward for embracing the errors of Mahomet, they are encouraged to marry as many wives as they choose ; yet is this less friendly both to their numbers, and political strength. Upon the whole, our faith in the *Bible History* is well supported by so curious a part of it.

Let us be thankful for the goodly heritage which we enjoy ; that we have no such marauders to fear ; and that by the advantages of the gospel, we too, are accomplishing the sweet words of God ^d.

VIII. ABRAM'S NAME CHANGED.

Chap. xvii. 5. *Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram ; but thy name shall be Abraham : for a father of many nations have I made thee.*

WHAT the text refers to, is necessary to be well understood, for the sake of clearing many other passages, both in the Old and New Testaments. In the thirteenth year after Ishmael's birth, and when Abram himself was Ninety-nine the LORD appeared to him ^e ; when he was promised an heir, and that from Sarai too.

^d Isa. xi. from verse 4.

^e Chap. xvii. 1.

Hitherto no small trial to the belief of each. But he who is ALMIGHTY, and All-sufficient, works how and when he will. To trust and obey like our ancient patriarch, 'is true wisdom. They are the best, indeed the only sure means of becoming perfect.

Then a still more solemn covenant than ever is condescended upon. The majestic appearance, and very singular goodness of heaven, brought him with pious reverence to the ground. Two parents to be in so advanced a period of life, was an amazing thought! and "multitudes again from " a single son. Hence he was to be no more called Abram, " but Abraham," that is, high father ^b. Literally true, but best understood of his spiritual believing issue by JESUS CHRIST, LORD of the Gentiles, as well as Jews. The whole is engaged for in the way of a covenant, styled everlasting, or what should continue to the end of the Jewish Œconomy; and thence forward, through CHRIST to the end of time. To the former of these, the promised possession in the land of Canaan was to be limited ^c. During this space, and while they continued steadfast to the divine unity, GOD was to be theirs as a special patron,

Then was the distinguishing rite of *circumcision* appointed; a bodily mark that could not afterwards deny, and which did bind them to do whatever GOD should see fit to enjoin. In time coming this was to be superseded by *Christian baptism* ^d. Thus is the divine covenant mutual. As Abram's name was then changed, so was Sarai's to Sarah, verse 15, in consideration of what there follows.

Then Abraham, full of *joyous faith*, was superior in his mind to all difficulties ^e. The son's name from Sarah, was to be *Isaac*, signifying *joy even to laughter*. As for *Ishmael*, the patriarch, in his devout wishes, is also heard; but in a manner very different in his posterity, from that of Isaac.

And Abraham did as the LORD had appointed him, with speed, and no small resolution. Hence, see the great value of *faith*, or *trust in GOD*, his promises ^f. Again, we should ob-

b Chap. xii. 7. c Exod. xxi. 6. d Gal. v. 3. e Rom. iv.

f Rom. iv. 21.

serve, that all the outward blessings of Heaven are free, and therefore to be acknowledged with quick and lively gratitude. If withheld, submission is due. Further, things of the greatest moment are common to all ^g. In all our approaches to *Him* who is infinite, great reverence is to be shewed.

IX. ABRAHAM'S HOSPITALITY REWARDED.

Chap. xviii. 3. *My Lord, if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away I pray thee, from thy servant.*

THE History connected with these words, is remarkably pleasant. God now appears to Abraham by *angels*, in *human form*. While at *Mamre*, he sat by the tent door, and both most likely covered from the sun, by a wide spreading oak.

From a musing posture, he lifts up his eyes upon them, and seeing them approach, he ran to meet them ^a. These natural beauties, and so well suited to a devout temper, we are told upon good authority, did all exist in the days of *Constantine*, first Christian emperor. It might be a frequent custom of the ancient patriarchs thus to sit, on purpose to be hospitable ^b. Just as declining from *noon*, the *heat* is usually greatest, and rest with food most welcome.

Men given to true worship are, or should be, men of special hospitality ^c.

In those early ages, *angel appearances* were not uncommon ^d. One of Abraham's present guests seems to have been *principal*; for as on earth, so in heaven, may there be differences of ranks and offices. An old man running to shew favour, exhibits a beautiful idea. He is polite too, and conciliating in his address: *My LORD*, and so forth. His manner even an angel of chief order would be pleased with ^e. A civil temper is congenial to goodness. Yet ought not *forms of courtesy* to abide a-

^g Heb. viii. 10. Jam. ii. 5.

^a Chap. xiii. 18.

^b Heb. xiii. 2.

^c 1 Jo. iv. 7, &c.

^d Chap. xix. 1.

^e 1 Peter iii. 8.

lone. Let a little water I pray you, be fetched, and what follows.

To avoid for a while, both outward and household inconveniences, rest thus refreshed under the oak. Servants are not wanting, and I myself will shew you an example, by fetching a *morsel of bread*. Let this simple *fare* stay you from fainting, agreeable to the margin, till better be provided. And they said, so do as thou hast thus kindly spoken. And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, giving her suitable directions.

The very best that they had was to be got ; and this, from a glowing heart, was all that could be wished. Under *bread*, as chief, a *meal* both then and since, has been fitly expressed. Give us this day our daily bread ^f !

Once more, Abraham ran, and fetched a *calf*, tender and good, and gave it to a young man of his house, to make ready for entertainment. And after its being dressed, he took *butter and milk*, and so forth. Moreover he stood beside them, to be gratified, as a bountiful *landlord*, by their eating to the full.

All which now over, they said unto him, where is Sarah thy wife ? He readily answers them, in the tent, with her *women companions*, agreeable to the customs of those places and times. And the chief angel said, so as to be over-heard, in *nine months* hence shall she have a son ; at which Sarah, not far distant did laugh, probably with some secret scorn. Supposing them to be men, whom fair looks as yet might deceive, or that they meant to *joke*. She is challenged by him who spoke in the name of the LORD, and hastily denies. After a mild, pitying rebuke, the assurance to Abraham is renewed : when he would proceed to execute another part of his commission.

Let us all be taught *hospitality to strangers*. They who ever sojourned, ought in particular, to know the heart of one. The more modest such are, the more compassion is due unto

^f 1 Kings xix. 6.

them^g. Next to strangers are those we are bound to by relationship and intimacy, with whom to live in mutual good terms, is one principal cement of life; enlivens conversation; and variously promotes an useful discharge of duties. Only want of power can excuse the inhospitable. Religious ministers should not be thus embarrassed. Though we have no miracles to look for, yet still the arguments of an indulging PROVIDENCE, and a future state we have to rely upon^h. Superior Beings may be yet witnessesⁱ. *Benevolence* will best prepare us for their company. *Politeness* itself, not overacted, is desirable. It is at least like doing good and communicating, whereas rudeness ever shocks.

X. ABRAHAM PLEADS FOR SODOM.

Chap. xviii. 23. *And Abraham drew near, and said, wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked.*

LOOKING towards *Sodom*, whither the three angels in human form did direct their course, and now become quite execrable, by *unnatural vice*^k, Abraham heard the chief of these *Celestial Beings* speak of a desolating judgment soon to take place: A thought which filled the Patriarch with deep distress. In the manner of the LORD's speech, as condescending to an infant state of the human mind, there is an example shewed to all judges in after ages, not to pass sentence in haste.

Signs of displeasure might now be read in those countenances, which till now had been so *placid*. Hence Abraham, with no small tenderness and piety together, presumes to say, Wilt thou, as seeming to have comission from GOD, destroy the righteous with the wicked. Among the former was his worthy relation Lot, and most of his, if not the whole of them. Peradventure, there may be fifty such within the city. I hope, nay trust, that this cannot be. Shall not the JUDGE of all the earth do right? Not unlikely the chief angel had shewed

^g Matth. v. 7.

^h Heb. xi. 16.

ⁱ Heb. i. 14.

^k See Exek. xvi. 49.

himself more majestically luminous than before. And the mild LORD allows him to have pled with justice ; and that all the place should be spared for their sakes. Transcendent Goodness ! Still more, as follows in the cases of forty and five, forty even downwards to ten. Who but must say, that the ALMIGHTY is slow to avenge ?

How conspicuous, in the two together, do humility and grace appear ! Each worthy of being imitated. Then the LORD went his way or became invisible ; and Abraham returns to his favourite place both for residence and worship.

Still, as then, God waiteth to be gracious ! Judgment is his strange work. *Pious parents* and good *children* may ever expect to be divinely enlightened ^b. God never can be ignorant how to act, or become unable. His lenity is expressed by going down and so forth. The devout friends of humanity, are the truest patriots ^c. The *wicked* themselves are often spared for their sakes. Such are the salt of the earth.

XI. SODOM DESTROYED.

Chap. xix. 13. *For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD ; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it.*

THE *deputed angels* now arrive at the devoted cities ; and their attention to means for being convicted, is exemplary. Towards *even*, they went to righteous Lot's house ^a. Meeting him at the gate, they are politely received ^b. He is hospitable like Abraham.

They would not be *troublesome*, nor yet could they hold out against benevolence ; and they turned in to him, and did eat, after refreshment otherwise. The *criminals* without disturb their enjoyment. They were numerous it seems, which is dreadful to think of. We may not further speak of them. Would to God, if we may lawfully say so, that the name of the guilt had perished with themselves.

^b Psal. xxv. 9, &c. ^c Jam. i. 27. Psal. cxii. 6. ^a 2 Pet. ii. 7. ^b Phil. iv. 8.

Nor *expostulations*, nor *offers*, even beyond right, would satisfy those *monsters*. Worthy Lot's mind is in a sort deranged, by violence without worse than *brutal*. At length, he is rescued by the good angels, and they are struck with *blindness*. After this, taking Lot's family, they announce the just fate of those enormous transgressors, in the name of the MOST HIGH God, whose deputies they were. At first they are hardly credited; but towards the dawn of the morning, the angels, still urging their commission, are obeyed. *Civility and righteousness* have now an ample reward. The *hospitable* seldom or never fail to be good friends. Angels of love, if they are pious also, do encamp about them; and perhaps oftener than known to the world, are employed to deliver them, verse 16, &c.

Lot from experience of past *favours*, petitions him who was chief, for *little Zoar*, and is accepted. Adorable Clemency! The name is properly changed to *Zoar*, signifying *going forth*, to perpetuate the same. Then the LORD rained down on the justly *loathed cities* of the *plain*, what did consume and turn its fruitfulness into a *proverbial deadly lake*. For denoting clearness and certainty, the LORD is twice repeated ^c. Dreadful Catastrophe! Standing monument ever since of Divine Justice. Encompassed with thick pitchy *bitumen*, deadly *smoke* to most animals, and retaining from thence its name, *dead sea*. Different authors, and heathen ones too, confirm our Sacred record.

Lot's wife would look back, and became what the scripture terms, a *pillar of salt*, that is, one way or other, a *preserved example* to posterity, of danger from dallying in the affair of clear duty. A congealed lump of any kind will answer, as salt denominates what is lasting. There is a *nitro sulphureous matter* that hardens like stone ^d. Pious Abraham looking towards the smoke, and convinced of ruin to the late fruitful plain, went for a visit to his friends, if yet safe, as far as *visible Zoar*.

Unhappily Lot lodged in a *cave* by himself, and musing upon subjects of sorrow, is led beyond the bounds of temperance with wine, either met with there, or brought along with

^c Zech. i. 16.

^d Luke xvii. 32.

him ^e. Some have thought of mitigations for what did follow, which yet can never serve to excuse ^f.

How dangerous is it to live among the wicked ^g. Better to be saved like Lot, than consumed with the vile.

XII. ABRAHAM AT GERAR.

Chap. xx. 11.—*Because I thought, surely the fear of GOD is not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.*

HERE we meet with another *melancholy defect*, in two admirable characters upon the whole. Both Abraham and Sarah are tempted to equivocate. Journeying southward, in the way that leads to *Egypt*, they stop at *Gerar*, the Capital then of *Palestine*. Here *Abimelech* was king, and unacquainted with the true GOD. Hence he is suspected by a sound believer, and not without reason, as one who would not scruple, if tempted, to do what was immoral; and in terror for his life, puts Sarah upon a denial of her highest connection with him, that she might there pass for his sister, as having had the same *grand-father*.

It was more like a *trap* for *Abimelech* than any thing else, though not so designed. Taken with Sarah's beauty still, though not a little advanced in life, he sends for her. But DIVINE goodness pitying a mistake upon the king's part, who might intend an honourable marriage, and to evince care for two strangers, affrights him from his purpose, in a dream which could not well be misunderstood.

And *Abimelech* whose virtue, all things considered, was not of an inferior kind, speaks in the true language of a patriotic prince. Let the words be well weighed. A principle of integrity he had, and pleads upon, which GOD accepts of.

And *He* said unto him, because of thy ingenuous regard to what is right, I withheld thee from sinning; now, therefore restore the man his wife, and so on. As a prophet he shall pray that thou mayest be forgiven, in so far of an *arbitrary mea-*

^e Prov. xxviii. 14.

^f 1 Peter ii. 11.

^g 1 Cor. xv. ~ Prov. i. 10.

sure, and be rewarded besides. Hence, *Abimelech* importing father, as well as king, rose up early, to prevent any the least molestation to Sarah, and told unto the *chief of his servants* what had happened as to each particular, so that they became sore afraid, for the length already gone. Being not very distant from *Mamre*, they might recollect to have heard of Abraham not a few high prophetic things.

The king then called Abraham, verse 9, and did mildly expostulate, saying in sum, thou verily hast done things, which thou oughtest not to have done.

The Patriarch in return attempts to extenuate what he could never excuse. In so far he was right, that reverential awe of OMNIPOTENCE is the surest, perhaps the only proper ground for uniform moral excellence. But that doctrine would still have been better taught, by a steadfast adherence to literal truth ^a.

Lay not *stumbling blocks* in the way of other people^b. When a part, not the whole of truth is made known, not a few, but many may suffer. It is a breach of love also, to suspect what we have no sufficient evidence for, to the injury of another. The sum of all religion is, ^c to fear God, and keep his commandments^d. Eminent worth in the end serves highly to ingratiate. And *Abimelech* took sheep, and so forth. Generosity for most part, if not always, accompanies a sincere mind. A mutual mild manner in *married life* doth well become the heirs of a celestial inheritance. It is a chief branch of gratitude to *pray for benefactors*. Heathen virtue should stimulate those of better principles to excel. God is no respecter of persons. Good Heathens will witness against bad Christian professors.

^a James iii. 2. Compare 2 Cor. i. 12. Gal. vi. 1. Eph. iv. 25, &c.

^b Matth. xviii. 6, &c. ^c Eccles. xii. 13. ^d Compare Psal. xxxiv. 11, &c.

XIII. ISAAC BORN.

Chap. xxi. 8. *And the child grew, and was weaned : and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned.*

THE promise of a son to Sarah herself, verse 1st, every thing considered, must have been no small trial to her faith; and no wonder, soon as the child was born, she was so willing to give him the significative name appointed^a, at the time of his circumcision.

Hagar, who chiefly through her mistress's own fault, had become too familiar, could not easily put up with so much joy in Isaac, and was impertinent. As the child grew in stature, on an occasion of natural and peculiar festivity, both Hagar and Ishmael did mock. Perhaps they both did claim a right of primogeniture to be shewed. Some go so far as to suppose that Isaac was struck^b, a crime yet more monstrous.

Sarah's displeasure arose to a degree which was hardly justifiable, verse 10. Cast out this bond-woman, and so forth, The thing was grievous to Abraham, because of promising appearances from Ishmael's vigour and fortitude, yet was he brought to consent. Here was also a clear overruling providence to fulfil^c. Sarah might intend what, upon the whole was amiss, but the designs of heaven were, it seems, to be thus answered. So, in many like cases, out of real evil, God educes good.

See mild Abraham's care in the sequel. He took bread, put for all other necessary food, and so on. Thus would he, through divine permission, keep peace at home. A pitiable situation.

Hagar, now a proselyte to true religion, proceeds in her way towards Egypt, whence she came. The wilderness of Beersheba she had to go through, where water in particular was not easy to be found; and that in the bottle brought along with her soon spent. Ishmael she placed under some shrub; and went from him to some little distance, yet so as

^a Chap. xvii. 19.

^b Gal. iv. 29.

^c chap. xvi. 10, &c.—xvii. 7, 8.

to have him in her view. Her probable design was to weep with more ease, for relief, and pray ^d.

And God heard, so as to accept her devotion, and likewise the cry of the poor lad; to comfort them by an angel messenger from heaven. His words savour much of celestial tenderness; Fear not, arise, and take what the sovereign LORD hath provided. She did so, trusting to what the messenger had said, with good effect. Motherly grief is stayed, and they are put into good condition for going on. So God, ever after this was with the youth, till he grew robust, and became an archer skilful as vigorous. Here he could hunt for food, and was able to defend himself if needful. In like manner they who might spring from his loins.

Still these last do not plough, but live upon herbs, milk and venison. Large camels, with dromedaries, they make use of for carrying; strong by nature, and more than other animals fit to endure thirst. Nor as yet, have they changed their customs. *Paran*, near to *Arabia*, was his earliest chief residence. Southward lay Egypt, whence Hagar, a native of that kingdom, chose for him a wife.

Here they might occasionally visit Abraham while in life, and it may be his descendants after him ^e. Hagar, too, might marry, and give rise to the Hagareans. Taking the whole together, an allegorized passage in Gal. iv. from verse 21st, receives much light. Figuratively understood, it is beautiful and pertinent ^f.

XIV. ABRAHAM SWORN.

Chap. xxi. 24. *And Abraham said, I will swear.*

THE solemnity of an oath here, may be accounted for, first, by Abraham's having been less direct, or true to the knowledge of some, than was proper; and next, through a divine interposition, to warrant such sacred obligation,

d Jam. v. 13.

e Chap. xxv. 9.

f Eph. vi. 5, &c.

and

and thereby to teach pure religion. The subject matter, to us may seem trifling; but a well of water was not so, in those parts of the world, where large plains, like that of Mamre, are but ill supplied.

When Abraham is said to reprove a king, it might be with some earnestness, but by no means indelicate. The property in dispute, was valuable, and even necessary to a whole and numerous household. Besides, kings did often rule in very small provinces. Our own island had many such, in early days. Abimelech's reply is sensible and polite: I wot not, and so on. I incline not to what is unjust; or even to the permission of any such thing. Now therefore, swear, continues he, &c. referring to Chap. xx. 14, 15. 'Their quarrel was not a personal one; but owing to rude servants; whence, when fully understood, the agreement became so much the more easy ^a.

Then Abraham offers to swear, by the very awful name that Abimelech had referred to, and did so ^b. Such appeals then are lawful in momentous cases; and to be understood as *acts of worship* ^c. It is mournful to think, in a Christian country, how many perjuries are complained of ^d. Swearing with rashness, in common discourse, leads but too easily to what is worse ^e. Be not speedy to resist. Make use of every good measure for reconciliation. What are most *losses* in comparison of peace. Only by pride cometh contention; whereas, it is the glory of a man to pass over a transgression.

And Abraham, imitating regal excellence, made a covenant, with sacrifices, after the manner of those times; not only for peace, but most likely for mutual subsequent aids ^f. Here too, was a kind of purchase, or at least a solemn public memorial: wherefore he called that place Beersheba; which signifies, the *well of an oath*. 'There they did eat and drink too sacrifically, as a joint act of friendship and devotion ^g. Hospitality, in bounds, promotes affection. The sweet social hour is sanctified by devout exercise. Such was Abraham; a man of rural taste, and pious.

a Jam. i. b Heb. vi. 16. c Jer. iv. 2. d Zech. v. 3, &c. Mal. iii. 6.
e Matth. v. 34. f verse 23. g 1 Cor. x. 16. Heb. xiii. 16.

XV. ABRAHAM TEMPTED.

Chap. xxii. 1. *And it came to pass, after these things, that GOD did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Behold, here I am.*

WHEN ALMIGHTY GOD is said to tempt Abraham, this must not be understood of his designing to make him offend ^a; but to try him rather, for his own good, by a severe method ^b.

Hardly any other could be more so than that which follows. By former appearances ^c, Abraham well knew when spoken to by the ALMIGHTY. After such a way as left him not the smallest ground for doubt, he is commanded to do what natural affection shrinks back from; that first law both of humanity and justice, to sacrifice his *son*, his only *son*, the *son of many promises*.

This, indeed, may be held as one of the most difficult passages upon record. Only an impulse of certainty, beyond all common evidence, can account for it. GOD calls, and he obeys ^d. There was to be no delay, and the place for execution was fixed upon.

And Abraham, fully satisfied of a divine command, doth readily set out, with a suitable provision for journeying; and to facilitate what he might not be quite sufficient for alone. Isaac, as yet ignorant of the design, is taken by the hand, and led. Thus they arrive at the destined part. There was a sacrifice to be made, which will suffer no amplification. Then, on the third day from their outset, Abraham lift up his eyes, and saw the *place*, as before described to him. Whether a glory stood thereon is doubtful, though in part, it might aid his composure.

Abraham directs his young men to step aside with the ass, while he and the lad went yonder, to worship. If they saw a majestic effulgence, this would make them the more yielding.

a Jam. i. 14, 15.

b Jam. i. 2, 3, 12.

c Chap. xv. 2.—xvii. 1.

d from verse 12.

With Isaac's aid, materials were carried to the *burnt-offering*. Still that itself was wanting. The sequel is inimitable, from verse 7th.

After building an altar and laying the wood, Abraham opens his high command to Isaac, who does not complain. He is bound to prevent an involuntary struggle, and laid on the altar; and, as the believing father stretched out his hand to slay, heaven interposes. Merciful God! How complete was this trial? In the very act of execution, an angel stays him; saying, Now I know, as henceforth it must be known to thyself, and all future ages, that thou fearest God, so as to do, and suffer any thing according to his will, seeing thou hast not, at heart, withheld thy son, even thine only son.

Next, the venerable patriarch lifted up his eyes, and behold, behind him a ram, caught in the thicket, is heard. With this, aided by son and servants, he presents an offering.

What a wise check was here given to human sacrifices, even where such proofs of command were given, as never afterwards did or could obtain? The LORD will ever see and provide, what to him is infinitely more acceptable. When God is said to know, as in verse 12, it comprehends esteem, approbation, and love ^d. What cannot devout souls do? And how may they not be able to suffer ^e?

How astonishing the love of God to mankind ^f? What shocks nature must often be overcome ^g.

XVI. ABRAHAM BLESSED.

Chap. xxii. 17. *That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies.*

AFTER a most signal trial to Abraham's faith ^a, it pleased God to corroborate former promises, by clearer

^d Ps. l. 7. 3. i. 17. John x. 28. ^e Rom. viii. 38, &c. Compare John x. 17, &c. Ps. xl. 6, 7. ^f 1 John iv. 7, &c. Rom. v. 7. and viii. 32. ^g Acts xv. 20

Matth. xvi. 25. Paul. lxxiii. 25, &c. ---lxxxiv. 11.

^a See Heb. xi. 17. James ii. 21.

and stronger language than ever, verse 15th, &c. An angel is there sent to speak in the name of his great constituent °.

In thy seed, or one descending from thee, must be understood CHRIST the MESSIAH, in whom both Jews and Gentiles were to be made for ever happy °. Hence Abraham became the father of us all who believe.

What a sweet continuation of rich divine goodness, from the earliest times ! How amazingly do the Old and New Testaments connect.

Returning to Beersheba ^d, there Abraham, with his family, did worship. The place was admirably adapted to such solemn service ; though like groves, afterwards, were shockingly abused. Here, some time after, it was told Abraham, that Milcah had born children to his brother Nahor ; who, even as himself, was a believer in the true GOD, which led him, probably to think of connecting his son with Rebecca.

The notice taken of OUR BLESSED LORD, in a direct line from Abraham, merits much regard ; as being highly prophetic. By the overthrow of Judea, such connection cannot now be so well traced as before. Hence, it must needs be, that MESSIAH is already come. His blessing, in time, will extend towards all °.

XVII. SARAH'S DEATH.

Chap. xxiii. 2. *And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba ; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan : and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.*

THE whole narrative in this chapter is sweetly simple, and instructive. Sarah was an hundred and twenty years old, when she died at Kirjath-arba. After some relief to nature, by weeping, Abraham stood up before the sons of Heth, in those parts, to bargain with them for the possession of a burial place. He must now have his late dear object

^b Chap. xii. 7.

^c Gal. iii. 8, 14. Acts iii. 25. Rom. iv. 14.

^d See Chap. xxi. 23.

^e Rom. Chap. xi.

removed from his sight ! Hid under ground ! Affecting thought ! and only consolable by religion. Decency and love are conspicuous here.

And the children of Heth would politely have made it over in compliment, from respect to so great a character, but Abraham, gratefully acknowledging them, would have it by purchase. After a short rest he now stood up again, to do them reverence ; and yet more handsomely than ever before, to commune with them. The cave of Machpelah is bought, understood by some to signify *double cave* : perhaps cut into niches.

Ephron, chief of the Hittites, shews himself particularly great and generous ; and Abraham no less handsomely thankful. Both worthy of being imitated. The purchase money was to be received as a new and high favour to the venerable Patriarch. A noble and virtuous struggle ! Money, then uncoined, behoved to be weighed out. Each shekel is thought to have been in value nearest to our half-crown. The price was equal, and the witnesses many. Machpelah was not far from Mamre, and nearly in an opposite direction ; so that the altar of God might give ease to his mind. It is now Hebron, in the land of Canaan ^b.

It is pleasant to observe, with how much calmness the *good* can speak of death. To them it seemed, as going to their pious fathers, as well as the termination of all present troubles. More than ever, under the gospel, a prime comfort ^c.

The circumstance of a burying-place is not material, unless for decency's sake. The very dust of worth is dear, and should, as much as may be, have a separation from common use. If Monuments speak at all, let them speak truth. A scripture word from the tomb will often be felt with advantage where good will subsists. Forms thereof appear to be unavoidable. Ceremony else is hateful ^d. A scant sour look argues alienation. Some, more mild, though *unprofessing*, disgrace such ^e.

^a Heb. x. 24.

^b Chap. xlix. from verse 20th.

^c Heb. ii. 14, 15.

^d 1 Thess. iv. 13. John xi. 24, 25, ---iv. 6, 27.

^e d Matth. xii. James iii.

13, 17, 18. Phil. iv. 8.

^c Isa. xlii. 2. 4.

XVIII. ISAAC MARRIED.

Gen. xxiv. 27. *And he said, blessed be the LORD GOD of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth; I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren.*

VENERABLE Abraham, now much advanced in life, wished to see Isaac, *the child of promise*, religiously married. This led him to think of *Bethuel's* family, who were near relatives of his own. Being distant, he is obliged to make his *suit* by a proven servant, and devout, whom he swears to fidelity, verse 2, &c. *Marriage is a serious bond*, and few or no risks ought to be hazarded therein ^a.

Orders, as ever ought to be, were made clear to Abraham's servant. Indeed the servant, with great prudence, insists for this, and is most fitly answered. An angel importing success, he is made sure of, by a scrupulous regard to *DIVINE Command*.

And the servant took ten *camels*, of common use there and large size, for carrying what was needful; and departed Eastward to *Mesopotamia*, between the two great rivers of *Euphrates* and *Tigris*, whence the land has its name ^b. Camels are regularly trained to kneel down and rise. Whole days after drinking, they can live without water, and be in spirits. *Women of rank* in those simple ages were accustomed to go to wells for domestic use.

The pious servant, at one of these, addresses the MOST HIGH to prosper him. His suppliant words are judicious and earnest. By the spirit, he seems to have been so prepared, which may account for minuteness. In certain faces too, and placidity of manners, may be read *temper or disposition*. At all events, duty and interest require that we should acknowledge God for pure and lasting enjoyment.

^a Gen. xi. 31. xxii 20.

^b 1 Sam. xxx. 17.

What *beautifies* the sex more than every thing, are, *courteousness, a humble mind, hospitality, promptness* to good works. Behold *Rebekah* was found such an one, who was born to *Bethuel*, son of *Milcah*, the wife of *Nabor*, brother of *Abraham*. In plain rural manner she comes to the well, *fair* to look upon, and *virgin modest*. Mindful of her duty, and how fast the night was coming on, she went and filled her *pitcher*, not without labour.

She asks no aid, but the servant of *Abraham* ran to meet her, from where he and his *camels* did rest, saying, let me, I pray thee, drink a little water, from what thou hast just now brought up. And she said, drink my lord, and welcome. Sweetly endearing to one after travel. Regarding the wants too, of the poor wearied animals, she is yet more complaisant, and said, I will, with permission, draw water for thy *camels*, and hasted to do it. How obligingly good! The servant holds his *peace* for a while, to admire how the LORD had prospered him, and think how he was next to proceed. A return of prayer next to literal, he could not but observe, verse 15. He is delighted with the ease of her benevolence, is thankful, and still more rewarded. How inestimable such a servant!

XIX. DISCOURSE.

AFTER *Abraham's* servant had for some little time conversed with *Rebekah* at the well, he put up his prayer again for success, and was heard. Her manner so answered to his own description of the one he was to make choice of, that he took out a golden ear-ring ^a, some say a jewel for the forehead, no matter which, since its value was great. Previous to which ^b, he had asked her father's family. The above he made by way of present, and was accepted. In addition to this, he gave her bracelets of gold, for the arms, of much more value. His prudence thus far must be obvious. Next he presumes to ask, if he might hope for a night's lodging? And her answer

a Verse 22.

b Verse 47.

was not only what he did wish for, but truly polite, and much in honour of her nearest relatives. It is worthy of leisurely perusal.

And the man bowed down his head to the damsel virgin; and then did lift up his soul in *ardours of gratitude to heaven*. His words are admirable, when compared with verse 7. Rebekah ran with speed to inform her mother's house of the whole transaction hitherto. The different sexes, both children and servants, had their different *rooms or tents*. Her mother's of course would be of easiest access.

Laban, the brother, being informed, ran out to the man, yet at the well: a pleasant hospitable idea. A stranger standing, and so benevolent as he had been, did move him much, and the day not far from a close. Come in, said he, thou blessed of the LORD, and so on. He wonders somewhat, that he had not immediately come along with his sister. Wherefore standest thou still! I have prepared room, and every thing else for thine accommodation. He might have begun, and the servants continue. Abraham's faithful steward required no solicitation. He went first into the house, to acknowledge their goodness, and then took proper care of what he had brought along with him. He had water brought to him for his own feet, in those warm climates very requisite ^c. When urged to eat, he would not, till he did open his commission. An excellence of character, much to be praised. He is allowed to speak on, and no small attention given to him.

Though brief and simple the narrative, it will be found highly agreeable to peruse ^d. A standing example of fidelity to all future ages, marked with a precision how both to give, and how to obey orders. Much domestic comfort depends upon this. The steward is at once plain and honest; tell me in clear terms.

Then Laban and Bethuel, both believers in the true God, saw his special providence therein, and did modestly acquiesce. Behold Rebekah is before thee, take her to be thy master's son's wife, if she wills as we do. Indeed there seems but lit-

^c Chap. xviii. 4.

^d Chap. xxiii. 6.

the room left to hesitate. The steward bows with pious gratitude to God, and the good family.

He brought forth the jewels still on hand, with various suits of raiment, and gave the chief of them to Rebekah, and after that, to the rest. When a joyous meal time was over, they went to rest. Next morning early, he wishes to be sent home, full of the delight which Abraham would have. But a few days detention of so amiable a daughter is sought, and hardly obtained, if at all, to any extent, Rebekah consenting. A simplicity of manners marks the whole. And with the now espoused damsel, they send a sister, and her nurse, which was both polite and consolatory. All obtain from the parents an affectionate blessing, conceived in the bold hyperbolic style of the east.

Thus they set out, and came with all convenient speed unto Isaac, who dwelt somewhat south, at the well *Labai-roi*, near *Beersheba* ^c. Solitude, upon occasions, suits the devout temper; and hence Isaac's practice was to walk by himself, and meditate towards sunset. The modest virgin seeing one whom she was told should be her husband, lighted off the Camel and veiled herself; in token of subsequent submission.

A tent of the late good Sarah's was nigh, and thither the young destined wife is led. One sore trial to so much happiness as they now enjoyed was the want of children; and how this did terminate, must for a time be left. We have seen how much a pure piety conduces to domestic union and felicity. It is to live like true heirs of the grace of eternal life!

XX. ABRAHAM'S DEATH.

Chap. xxv. 8. *Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.*

AFTER Sarah's death, Abraham married Keturah, and had children by her ^a. Zimran in particular,

^c Chap. xvi. 14.

^a Verse 6.

whence

whence came the *Zamreni*, *Jockshan* and some others. *Midian*, more than any of them, seems to have been distinguished, as father of the *Midianites* ^b. Where after all certainty is not to be looked for : neither is it much needed.

The chief of Abraham's inheritance was given, as long before designed, to Isaac ^c. His years were an hundred three-score and fifteen. A good old age indeed, after much virtue, though far from perfect, in its strict sense. Through grace and that alone, he could hope ^d. It is the right use of life, that doth constitute the valuable length thereof, and to such *death* can never be premature.

To be blended with fathers who have been good, in kindred dust, is nothing to meeting with them in heaven. Behold, there they all live to God ^e.

Isaac and Ishmael lived at some little distance, and therefore could meet together, for burying their late common father at *Machpela*'s. Hereby love, to a certain degree, and devotion too, would be excited ; for their present end in view was a solemn one, and an altar was at hand.

Here again the ALMIGHTY LORD did eminently bless Isaac. Ishmael and his generations are passed over, unless by marks of their warlike spirit. Predictions, relative to them, have and are still fulfilling. When the ways of God are unsearchable, we ought to venerate and wait with patience. Fear not to die, if good. It is to be gathered with a like innumerable company ; and among such, it may be hoped, some of our nearest and dearest intimates ^f.

XXI. ESAU AND JACOB BORN.

Chap. xxv. 23. *And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels : and the one people shall be stronger than the other people ; and the elder shall serve the younger.*

WE have it not in our power, nor are we obliged to justify all scripture characters, even where, upon the

^b Chap. x. 9. ^c Jer. xxv. 23. ^d Isa. lx. 6. ^e Chap. xxiv. 36.

^f 2 Tim. i. 12. ^g iv. 6, &c. ^h Phil. i. 21. ⁱ 2 Cor. v. 7, 8.

^j Psal. lxxiii. 25, &c.

whole, there is no small prevalence of good ; but ought rather to admire the candour of sacred history, in recording what is blame-worthy, and ourselves to be cautious.

At present we have to observe that Isaac, as his late father Abraham had been, was tried for some while with the want of children by Rebekah, which led him to intreat the LORD for her, with success. And the children, before their birth, for they were *Twins*, struggled to appearance within her : which did not a little surprise, perhaps even vex the unexperienced mother. We are all but too apt to presage what is evil, from uncommon signs. And the gracious LORD pities her, by a prophetic vision, or dream. And behold, the first born twin came forth *red*, not unlike to a hairy garment ; expressive of strength, with some measure of fierceness ; and they called his name Esau, or Made, for distinction's sake : and after that came his brother, emblematically too, taking hold of Esau's heel ; and his name was called Jacob ; presaging somewhat of more art than would belong to the former. In fact, as will be seen, he did supplant his brother. Twenty years by this time had Isaac been married to Rebekah.

And the boys grew up, Esau delighting to hunt, and Jacob, more soft by nature, inclinable to dwell at home. Isaac was fond of Esau, as valour, besides his being first born, was conciliating. The other meek like himself, and familiar, he shewed less of this to ; though in estimation, he might prefer the last.

Venison for a declining appetite, and suitably dressed, did endear the hunter ; though all things considered, it would have been wise to hide the too apparent partiality as much as possible. Rebekah was similarly fond of domestic Jacob. Both children, with advancement in life, did court superior regard, which should have been avoided.

And Jacob, agreeable to the simplicity of those early times, sod pottage, or got his mother to do so for him, after an enticing manner, in both flavour and look. Esau, just from the field, and nearly faint with weariness and hunger together, asks some of the pottage, lentile-broth, say some, and could not
obtain,

obtain, but conditionally. Far from vindicable. The condition was to sell him then his birth-right privileges. An extravagant cruel price! Most likely thus tempted to ask, from a known voluptuousness and ferocity of temper together. Without apologizing for Jacob, we must blame Esau for his hastiness and indifference to a valuable concern ^a. If the one was given to appetite, the other was subtile. He ought to have set him right, instead of swearing him to do amiss. Solemn oaths should be kept in reserve for better purposes, to determine what cannot be done otherwise. And thus did Esau hastily, if not profanely sell his birth-right.

Then he did eat and drink to the full, unmoved at the time, for what had been done; and the secular effects thereof, as would seem, not to be remedied even by tears. Let sinners take heed, when they are first tempted ^b. Animal impulses are peculiarly dangerous. Flee youthful lusts ^c. Both Esau and Jacob, afterwards, did suffer in part. Fairness, as to bargaining, is a great virtue. The best have need to watch and pray ^d. Opportunities lost, may not be recoverable.

XXII. ISAAC AT GERAR.

Chap. xxvi. 9. *And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife; and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her.*

IT might have been expected, from what Isaac probably knew of his father's conduct at Gerar, that he should not have prevaricated, after his example. But there are times when the best may be off their guard: and, in all ages, the fear of man worketh a snare. Let the good themselves be imitated with caution.

A famine in the land where Isaac dwelt, obliged him to go where there was hazard; and against which, he ought to have

^a Heb. xii. 15, &c.

^b Psal. i. 1, 2.

^c Rom. viii. 5, &c.

^d Eph. vi. 16.

^a Chap. xx. 2, &c.

armed himself. No temptation can vindicate a deliberate breach of trust, that necessary bond of the social compact; and prime attribute of the divine nature ^a.

In Gerar, for a while, he continued without molestation; till being asked by the inhabitants concerning his wife, who, like Sarah, appears to have been beautiful; he said, she was his sister. A question so invidiously put, imported some evil design; and his wife's chastity should have been more dear to each of them than life. Without all peradventure this was wrong. An honest answer, and an immediate flight, would have much better become him. Yet to fear our own weakness is preferable to severe censure. In the way of duty, we are safe with God ^b. Abimelech, in this respect, had the advantage of Isaac; for looking in, by a window, he perceived dalliances, more like a married pair, than the connection of brother and sister: and calling Isaac, by one of his servants, did most fitly expostulate with him.

The generous king, moreover, charged his people, not to use either of them improperly, under pain of death: So that even Isaac might have learned from such noble purity and justice. Here too, he had a rich supply of provision. Let the scriptures have due commendation, from their regard to faithful narrative; and every upright reader take heed lest he fall.

Divine fidelity may, and ever should be trusted ^c. The blessing of CHRIST, MESSIAH, is renewed to Isaac, in one of his posterity ^d. Let not children be tempted to falsify, by obliging them with violence to witness against themselves; but, when there is need for it, examine with great tenderness.

As Isaac's share of wealth increased, the encompassing Philistines did envy him; and who can stand before this? They stopped up the wells, which were there of great value, and not to be dug again, without much expence both of time and labour. Here too, was Abimelech intimately concern-

^a Chap. xx. 2, &c.

^b See verse 3.

^c Jam. i. 17.

^d 1'sal. xxxiv. 11, &c. compared with 1 Peter iii. 13.

ed ; whence they did act both offensively, and defensively together. What a happiness to live under good civil rule ^c.

XXIII. ISAAC'S PIETY.

Chap. xxvi. 25. *And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there : and there Isaac's servants digged a well.*

AFTER digging the wells, which malicious envy had covered up ; to perpetuate his father's memory, he gave them like names as they had before. Another new found, and superexcellent, of Abimelech's servants sought to deprive him of ; which gave the name of *Esek*, or *contention* to it ; and valuing peace more than outward property, he leaves it, to find out another. And this they also strove for. Presuming upon a king's interest, they became quite arbitrary. To this last well, therefore, he gave the name of *Hatred* ; which ever chooses to extend violence, as far as possible. Hence, again he removes to be out of their power ; styling this place in the joy of his peaceable heart, *Rebboth*, or *Rcom*, and that as a gift of the LORD.

Here the MOST HIGH emblematically appeared unto him ; and spoke with great kindness. It was nigh to Beersheba ^a. And Isaac builded an altar there, for family-worship ; one of the earliest kinds, and which needs no prescription to the ingenuous. Since, even among the more unenlightened, household gods were next to universal. Both will rise up in judgement one day, against too many.

The love of peace doth ever mark the true children of God ^b. It is a degree of piety in them, to keep up the remembrance of good ancestors. For prudence' sake, it should be observed, that contracts not written are too easily broken ^c. The intimacies of friendship, however at times, may be sparing as to these. Order, in common, is the way to avoid future

^c 1 Peter ii. 13, &c. 1 Tim. ii. 1, &c.

^b Matth. v. 9, 39.

^a Chap. xxi. 31.

^c verse 20.

disputes. A bone of contention after death is a dreadful legacy.

Quietness made room for Isaac ; and so has it done to vast multitudes since. To be mild in plenteousness, is a great character ; and an high ornament in the sight of God ^d.

Feasts, in token of sociality, are very natural ; and of use to cement. In midst of Isaac's ease and grandeur, his son Esau grieves him, by an improper marriage ^e.

XXIV. REBEKAH's ART.

Chap. xxvii. 9. *Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats ; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth.*

REBEKAH's artifices, and Jacob's yielding, are neither of them vindicable. Some extenuation however there may be, from the purchased birth-right, Isaac's partiality to Esau, and Esau's late impious marriage.

When Isaac was old, and his eyes dim, the mother and younger son agreed upon a method of supplanting the eldest. The narrative is plain, and affecting. Fairness of history throughout is manifest. Perhaps, as yet, Isaac did not well understand the divine oracles ^a : the elder, in his descendants shall serve the younger. This Rebekah might, as somewhat further alleviating, have known ; though it was her duty to have considered that JEHOVAH knows best how to accomplish his own ends.

However in permitting her duplicity, he punishes one who had been profane ^b. Overhearing Isaac's requisition, she aims at disinheriting Esau, so far as the father's last blessing could go ; and therefore gave Jacob a counsel, by which her aged husband might be misled. The artifice, though of difficult execution, was carried on with success.

Had she made a savoury dish without designing what was indirect, the good wife would have had claim to just praise ;

d verse 26.

e Chap. xxiv. 3. Eccl. vii. 14.

a Chap. xxv. 23.

b Heb. xii. 16.

but that her husband might bless before death, contrary to his intention, is at least a lessening of so good a work. A mother instructs her favourite son how to deceive; and that a blind dying parent too. The deceiver at heart most justly fears, but is maternally overruled. He even hazards a curse, a father's curse. If at the time he had stood but in equal awe of ALMIGHTY GOD, his character, for certain would have suffered less.

And she, the mother, said unto him, the curse be upon me, my son, only delay not! Trusting to her superior knowledge, he obeys; and the mother, from experience of Isaac's taste as to food, did execute her part well. She next clothed Jacob so as might best forward the deceit: for by any better name one cannot easily term it. There was a savour of sweet ointment added, which would obviously subserve their design; verse 27. The sons being twins would not much differ probably as to size.

In a tone of voice as nearly resembling Esau's as possible, and with great affection, he addressed his old parent. My father, my father, arise, and so forth. He now falsifies in a direct manner, for vice is speedily progressive. With so quick a provision Isaac is astonished. The wilder kind of animals are not soon found out and caught. Jacob's lying is aggravated by using the name of the LORD HIS GOD, to account for his speed. And he knew what would affect most his father's piety.

How desirous Isaac was to be made certain, appears from 21st and following verses. A last benediction did require great seriousness, being often at this time prophetic^c. Tremblingly does Isaac suspect, saying, the voice is Jacob's, but the hands are the hands of Esau. Enough for the purity and ardour of unsuspecting love.

After a refreshing meal, he proceeds to bless Jacob, supposing him still to be Esau, which should be read with great attention, as overruled to predict what did really happen^d. To those who are familiar with after history, the conquest made

c Chap. xlix. throughout.

d Job xxxviii. 25, &c.

by King David will occur, over *Moab, Ammon, Syria, Philistia and Edom.*

Soon after this first blessing was announced, Esau came in with his real and well dressed venison, expecting his father's *prime benediction*. Rough in temper, and improperly connected as he was, humanity is moved for him. The deceit was already past, and could not it seems be rectified. It was a permission of heaven, and the patriarch himself submits, saying, Him have I blessed, yea, and he shall be blessed. Esau now cried, and sought with tears, what he did forfeit by his impious rashness. Then adds, Bless me also, O my father ! To which Isaac consents, from verse 39, no less prophetic than the former, and referring at least in part to *Arabia*, commonly termed the *Happy*, for its abundant wealth ^e.

Hatred from henceforward of Jacob did ensue, so as to think of putting him to death, after that of his father. Through Gracious PROVIDENCE, however, that was prevented. Time itself helps to allay fury ^f. It is best after all, to cease from wrath, before it be well meddled with ; in regard, the beginning thereof is like the letting out of waters. Avoid causes of dispute, such as pride, ambition, covetousness. The best of mere human characters must not be imitated to the utmost. Least of all, when understanding was but in earliest state.

XXV. JACOB GOES TO LABAN.

Chap. xxviii. 10. *And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran.*

BY Rebekah's advice, Jacob departs at some greater distance from Esau ^a : even to Laban, in *Haran*. Her reasons were good, and therefore not opposed by Isaac ^b. She charges him withal to form no matrimonial connection with one idolatrously educated. A last charge could not but af-

^e Chap. xxv. 23.

^f Rom. xii. 18.

James i. 20. &c.

^a Chap. xxvii. 44.

^b Chap. xxviii. 1, &c.

fect, being accompanied again with solemn benediction and prayer.

He then goes directly to Laban, the brother of Rebekah, and under the full power of true filial obedience. To avoid mischief likewise from an offended brother was prudent ^c. Esau's rage however increases; and wherein he had transgressed before, he transgresses yet further, by a plurality of wives, and regardless of their religion.

In the course of Jacob's journey, he halted for a night's rest, where he might also worship God. The *turf*, it is probable, was his bed, and a *stone* his pillow, to be made use of next day for an altar ^d. Here he had an extraordinary *dream* of a *ladder* reaching from earth to heaven, whereupon were angels of the MOST HIGH ascending and descending. The LORD JEHOVAH speaks to him from above, in words of great encouragement to a devout mind. They were likewise clearly prophetic, and a promise of *Messiah* again imported in them. Every circumstance, however, in matters of this sort, ought not to be understood as conveying religious and moral instruction; so the ablest both *Jewish* and *Christian interpreters* direct. The *ladder* may denote certainty and steadfastness of an overruling PROVIDENCE. He has angels at command to minister. Men may, and do often vary, but he cannot ^e. What was promised to Jacob, did reach long after, to his posterity.

No wonder when Jacob awoke, he understood this to be a certain divine manifestation, and being as yet to him quite new, he was afraid. How dreadful! And how much to be respected! The gate of heaven, and I, a poor mortal brought thither! Rising early in the morning, he took the chief pillow stone, and set it up by consecration, as a standing memorial, calling the place Bethel, or the House of God. Monuments of DIVINE goodness may be superstitiously abused; but in themselves are not improper.

And Jacob, verse 20, vowed a vow, saying, if God will continue to be with me, and keep me; then shall he be my cho-

^c Matth. x. 16.

^d Verse 18.

^e Jo. i. 51.

sen God, now and for ever. He may be thought by some too minute; but the warmth of affection is not easily limited; nor doth OMNISCIENCE critically blame like men. There is no want of submission in them^f. A tenth of what he shall prosper in is at the same time devoted to religious and charitable purposes; ever since, almost deemed a kind of sacred number, though not indispensably binding. Moreover, a true almoner for heaven cares not to be limited, and a twentieth with some, will do more than even a fifth from others^g.

XXVI. JACOB COMES TO LABAN.

Chap. xxix. 6. *And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well; and, behold Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.*

JACOB is now in the land of his kinsfolk. And looking about him, beholds a *well*, which in that level warm country was a special Divine favour. There were flocks of sheep too lying, which did indicate some respectable family-neighbourhood. Here he was not mistaken; for soon almost as himself arrived, he saw men to converse with, and said unto them, in the simple, yet courtly style of those days, My brethren, what be ye? And they said, of Haran are we. He next asked for Laban, and was agreeably answered. They inform him further, that his daughter Rachel, as shepherdess, was on her way to the well, not then below people of good rank in life. Whence kings themselves are denominated shepherds of the people. Indeed Rachel's own name is taken from a sheep.

Being high noon, and a fit time to rest, they advise him to this, and so depart till *even* should call them to carry the stone from off the well. And while he so spake with them, Rachel appears, with the last of her father's flocks. He then went near to save his relative the trouble of moving away the

^f Psal. l. 15.

^g Eph. v. 1, 2.

stone. In such a situation nothing could be more natural; and yet Laban, as Jacob's mother's brother, is often repeated by the sacred historian, as an apology for Jacob's acting in so familiar a manner.

He even presumes to *salute* Rachel, and lift up his voice, and wept for joy. After which short interruption, he told her who he was. And from like tenderness, Rachel ran and told her father. And when Laban heard of his sister's son, he too ran to meet him as a stranger, and one of his own; embraced, kissed him, and brought him to his house. There he had opportunity to be more full in his account, which led Laban to say, Surely thou art my *bone* and my *flesh*.

Thus for a month they dwelt together, and Jacob refused no service to his kinsman that was in his power. Laban then said unto him, why shouldst thou serve me for nought? Tell me in plain terms, what shall thy wages be? And Jacob, which her father by this time might suspect, loved the beautiful Rachel, and said, I will serve thee seven years for this thy daughter. Upon which terms they close. And during that space, though long, they did seem to Jacob from strength of affection, like a few days.

The obliquity of conduct which follows this, is quite unvindicable. Only an early age of human kind can extenuate the crime. After seven years, Jacob claims what he had faithfully served his *uncle* for, and is by a stratagem disappointed. A punishment in kind however of his own *duplicity*, in the case of Esau, not uncommon ever since. Contracts are sacred, and ought to be inviolable. *Marriage contracts* more than any.

Love, which shortens time, to appearance doth proportionably enhance the pain of disappointment. Jacob serves seven years more for Rachel, now to be his second wife with Leah. A custom which the purity of the *gospel* doth not suffer. It was nonsense, if true, that the younger might be hurt for sake of the elder^a. Jacob uses a piece of dexterity to compensate the wrong done him: Perhaps not free from just censure nei-

^a Psal. xvii. 14, 19.

ther. For hating Leah, or loving her less, Rachel abides barren for a time. Let nothing be preferred to mental and moral beauties. Above all, the pure love of supreme excellence¹.

XXVII. DISCOURSE.

Chap. xxx. 25. *And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go into mine own place, and to my country.*

SOME things which follow in this chapter are difficult to explain, so as to defend; yet upon the whole, they manifest an agreeable impartiality of narrative, and may serve as an useful warning to all future ages, to follow precept, rather than defective examples.

Jacob hitherto had served his father-in-law, for little of this world; with which his mind begins to be affected: let me now go, said he. His wives and children did require more support than formerly^b. The superior number of Leah's family renders Rachel by far too impatient, and led her to a measure no ways vindicable. By Bilhah, her handmaid, she had two sons, nominally her own. These, with four of Leah's, became all heads of *Jewish* tribes.

Another handmaid, Zilpah, became the mother of children. Each of them trespasses against what had been from the beginning. Comfortable marriage admits of no such division in love. The unimproved state of human nature is our only defence here. Another transaction between Leah and Rachel stands much in need of the like apology. Of what sort however the *mandrakes* were, whether flowers or herbs^c; they might be understood to have certain virtues too.

At length, God is pleased to grant Rachel in person, her desire, and gave her Joseph; so conspicuous afterwards in *Jewish* record. Such was the condition of Jacob's wives and children, when he sought leave to depart from Laban, and is convinced of his just right. The son-in-law is allowed in time

^a 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^b Chap. 29th.

^c Cant. vii. 13.

coming, to name his own wages, and is accepted ^c. They appear not to have been unreasonable, though the means made use of afterwards to increase his own stock, are not easy to explain, nor perhaps quite vindicable. It is to be hoped, that in reward for his connecting himself by marriage, with a family of true believers, GOD was pleased somehow or other to guide. From henceforward, the two appear to have lived distant about three days journey, with their flocks. And Jacob took him rods, &c. Some naturalists have employed their skill, to account for Jacob's success. If a stratagem, we have no defence to make, seeing Laban was not, before this, let in to the measure that Jacob had in view.

Simplicity or fairness in bargaining, seems essential to justice. As to the fact, observe how it did issue ^d. The sons of Laban are provoked at the increase of their brother, and his sudden departure. However, with that he is favoured from above, and discloses his scheme first to Rachel, who either from love to certain of her father's images, on account of their value, or from superstition, did steal them away. These, from neighbour practices around them, might be understood as a kind of protecting household gods, not to be warranted.

They now set their face from the river *Euphrates*, where afterwards, stood ancient *Babylon*, towards *Mount Gilead*, joining to *Libanus*, or *Lebanon*. The largeness of their company and flocks did not suffer great speed, and they are soon overtaken. The sons of Laban sharply rebuke them, yet more for uncourteousness than any thing else. The force of such words as they made use of must be felt. It was in the power of their hand to do hurt in appearance; but they were overruled. Next inquiry is made for what Rachel had stolen. Jacob excuses himself from any knowledge in this matter, and speaks with a strong abhorrence of the evil. His wife not so scrupulous, adds lying to injustice, if not direct, yet by much too equivocal. The suspicion of character rouses displeasure, but is soon settled: appealing to God for his innocence and usefulness to the whole family he was now to leave ^e. Let

^c Verse 32.

^d Verse 43, &c.

^e Jam. i. 20.

devotion ever sanctify justice, and justice be the ornament of devotion. Divine worship, and a memorial pillar, now takes place, called *Jegar-Sabadutha*, or the heap of witness, by Laban. But in *Hebrew*, *Galeed*, of the same import with the foregoing *Syriac* names.

The country about, they called Mizpah; that is the beacon, or watch-tower. Whence pious Jacob said, and Laban forthwith agrees, The sovereign LORD JEHOVAH watch between thee and me. Thus ought distant friends ever to meet at the throne of grace, for mutual benefit. Boundaries to prevent harm, are also prudent ^f. To vary these, for private ends, is highly criminal; as now, to forge bills, bonds, &c. They are blessed of God, who prevent differences, and who endeavour to terminate them.

XXVIII. ESAU AND JACOB MEET.

Chap. xxxii. 3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother, unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

ESAU had once meditated the death of his brother, on account of what he had done, by the instigation of Rebekah. She, therefore, directs Jacob to go as far as Laban's house, in the east, till anger might abate; and Isaac, though with much reluctance, we may be sure, did consent, and chiefly for religion's sake.

Jacob's business accomplished there, his next pressing difficulty was to meet Esau at his return. Here he prays, and is encouraged by a vision; styling the place *Mahanaim*, or *Hlsts*; and then sent messengers before him, with presents to soothe the brother's wrath ^a.

The message sent by Jacob, was modest, courteous, and conciliatory ^b. His messengers returned, saying, thy brother Esau cometh to meet thee, with a band of men. Then Jacob was greatly afraid, from recollecting what he had done; and concerts the most prudent measure he could think of. His heart all the while is turned to God in prayer. Delightfully

^f Chap. xxxi. 32.

^a Chap. xxvii. 40.

^b Prov. xv. 1.

solemn and beneficial. Thus piously composed, he adventures forward, after a short rest, on the banks of Jordan. How calm and respectful is Jacob here ! and in his subsequent directions to the servants : good order is the natural fruit of exercised wisdom.

Time all along is given for his gentle words and presents to operate. Passing over the ford *Jabbock*, as shortest and best, for his numerous family ; he causes them to proceed slowly and regularly, until he should be left alone, for further divine worship ; and has the honour of a most signal angelic interview, which does not easily admit of being explained. Only, that success was assured to him, and a sign left in commemoration thereof which could not well be forgotten.

Peace making, of most things else, doth well become the pious. No selfish considerations, unless what are justly accounted grievous, ought ever to outweigh these. A wrestling angel, in human form, and under clouds of night, might well pass with Jacob, for one of Esau's band ^c. To offend is bad, but to persevere in difference, is worse : Conciliatory arts are more to be studied, than even those of secularly enriching. All to be laid in the fear and imitation of Omnipotent Love. Much of heart's ease is possessed by the pious ^d.

XXIX. PENIEL.

Chap. xxxii. 30. *And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel ; for I have seen GOD face to face, and my life is preserved.*

AFTER prudently preparing to meet with Esau, Jacob trusts not to his own understanding, but commits, at large, his way to God. Unsupported by him, the best means must fail. After a singular wrestle Jacob is assured of success. The might of angelic exertion was, ever after, to be observed in the hollow muscle of his thigh ; but at the time, he maintains his ground, and is blessed. The name he went by in

^c Matth. v. 9. Psal. xxxiv. 12, &c.

^d Eccl. vii. 14. Jam. v. 13.

Psal. lxxiii. 23, &c.

common, after this, was to be no longer Jacob ; but Israel, or wrestler : for as much as a prince, he had power with God, in his celestial messenger ; as very soon, he would find to be the case, likewise with men.

Then, taking more courage than ever, he said to the celestial Being, What is thy name ? And in return, he meets with a solemn benediction. Whence he styled the place Peniel ; signifying the face of God : wondering in himself, how his life had been preserved. From scripture references made to this transaction ^a, some have urged reasoning, and particularly in prayer. Yet ought not these to be too far pushed by poor sinful men. Short and simple prayers do often affect ourselves, and human hearers most ; nor are they least acceptable to the MOST HIGH. Witness our LORD's prayer. Watching unto this duty, and persevering therein, comes nighest to Jacob's manner.

Among other things, his lame appearance could not fail to soften Esau ; and might, with other reasons, have had this in view. The strong in general, have a tendency to compassion. As the sun rose, he halted on his thigh, so as to be quite visible : For how long, we cannot say. In remembrance, the children of Israel eat not of the sinew in any animal. How pleasant and interesting is the sequel ^b.

And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and so forth. His family is divided into proper order. And he passed over before the whole ; and bowed himself before Esau with great respect : which wrought upon him, like a charm, even far beyond the power of his gifts. He ran, fell on his neck, and wept in love, as did Jacob, till then the chief offender of the two.

When Esau saw the women and children ; he asked his brother, who they were ? And owning in them the divine goodness, they too came respectfully forward. Next the presents are brought ; which Esau nobly did refuse. Still Jacob urged acceptance, with equal lustre of generosity. A delightful contest. At length the younger brother prevails. The offer of attending to guard Jacob, is genteelly declined. To praise, admire, and imitate, is all that is now left us.

^a Hos. xii. 4, &c.

^b Chap. xxxiii. from the beginning.

So Esau went on with speed, and Jacob, by short accommodating stages, first to Succoth, named from Booths ; and then to Shalem, a city of Shechem, in the land of Canaan ; where he bought a parcel of ground from Hamor, or Emmar. Here his grateful piety led him to build an altar, for divine worship ; giving to it the name of El-elohe-Israel, that is, God, the God of Israel ^c. Seek to know the best things of every one, with a view to imitate ^d.

XXX. A VILE BROKEN CONTRACT.

Chap. xxxiv. 30. *And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me, to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites, and the Perizzites ; and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me ; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.*

WHAT gave occasion to these severe expressions of mild Jacob, was a breach of solemn engagement, variously aggravated. His sons, every one must allow, had met with some provocation ; yet by no means such as to warrant deliberately false and cruel crimes. Offers of mutual concord were made and accepted of ; which, therefore, ought to have been sacredly kept. The affair admits not of a public reading.

If their sister Dinah's virtue did suffer ; it was by her own fault in part. She ought to have taken some companions with her, in a strange place. Jacob's purchases from Hamor should have been patiently waited for ; and the altar worship well begun. If prompted to rashness by her good looks and wealth, still she was the more to blame, and the consequences were fatal to many ^e.

Festival occasions too, are hazardous ; and by one of these, Josephus, the Jewish historian says, Dinah did so suffer as in our scripture narrative. The utmost possible reparation was

^c James i. 17. ¹ Pet. iii. 8. Phil. iv. 8. ^d 1 Tim. ii. 8. ¹ Pet. iii. 7.

^e 1 Peter ii. 11.

proposed, and agreed to, but not kept by Jacob's sons ; though modesty and ease were in no small degree to suffer. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous. Religious formalities themselves are overcome by these.

What was done in opposition to faith both religious and civil, is not to be thought of without horror. Simcon and Levi were chief instigators ; whence their venerable father, afterwards declares their guilt accursed. Ye have troubled me, and so on. He has no apology to make, neither have we. Even a right religious belief did suffer by their means ; as has been the case since with many inconsistent professors ^b. The basest of all faults are falsehood and cruelty ^c.

To avoid unequal marriages, is agreeable to sound doctrine ^d. In principle Jacob's children were right, but not in practice ^e. A dowry, upon occasions may be sought for a promising child ^f. Marriage should be solemnly transacted.

To add affliction to trouble is savage ; or to take advantage of inability. Such crimes too, are more than most others, of a growing nature ^g. What bounds can be set to those who plunder ? Disturbing the good is cruelly unjust ^h.

XXXI. JACOB SENT UNTO BETH-EL.

Chap. xxxv. 3. *And let us arise, and go up to Beth-el ; and I will make there an altar unto GOD, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.*

WHEN the ALMIGHTY made appearances of old, it is most likely that was done in luminous form : yet not certain. Learned Jews have long termed it, Shechina. From one of this sort, Jacob receives the command to arise, &c.

He had dwelt before at Beth-el ⁱ. Perhaps the late cruel act of his two sons might determine for this remove. To

^b Rom. ii. 21, &c. Tit. i 16. Matth. vii. 15, &c. ^c John viii. 44.
^d Gen. xlix 5, &c. Isa. viii 20. ^e 2 Cor. vi. 14, &c. ^f 1 Pet. iii.
^g from verse 1. ^h f verse 12. ⁱ g verse 27. ^h See Jer. xii. 1, &c.

ⁱ Chap. xxviii. 23.

worship likewise, among idolaters could not be safe. Jacob forthwith obeyed, and took his family along with him. For the sake of true religion, he has other orders given him. His obedience is full of pious gratitude ^v. How often do others forget vows made in their extreme distress? Idols, and every token of respect for them, is put out of the way; perhaps melted first, or bruised to pieces. Thus did Moses, and Hezekiah, afterwards.

Still kind providence watches over Jacob in the course of his subsequent journeying; till he came to Luz, in the land of Canaan: and not far from Beth-el; where he made provision for regular family-worship. Pious love is an animating principle. Here Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was mourned for, as a near relation. What less is due to a degree of maternity, while infants? The place of her sepulchre was suited to the name then given, *Allon-bachuth*, or the Oak of weeping. Under a like gloom, did the ancient druids worship; and often by dreadful sacrifices.

And God appeared to Jacob again, and gave him the name to be oftenest called by, in his posterity, Israel; and renews his gracious promises to them. A favour instantly and devoutly acknowledged. A Beth-el verily, or house of God.

From thence they journeyed to Ephrath ^c, nigh to which Rachel was taken with child-bed-pains, brought forth a son, and died. She calmly named him herself, Ben-oni; the son of my sorrow. Reading herein too, her impatience for children. Jacob more prophetically, after that, styled him, Benjamin; or the son of the right hand. A stay indeed he did prove to his old age ^d. Rachel's death was a sore affliction to the aged patriarch; and, among other things kept in remembrance by a monumental pillar.

Next, he proceeded to the Tower of Edar; signifying the Flock ^e. Here he dwelt and met with some new trials. At length he and his far advanced father in life, met at Arba; better known afterwards, as Hebron, where Isaac dies, when an hundred and four score years old. To be gathered with

b Chap. xxviii. 20.

c Verse 16.

d Judg. xx. 35, &c.

Matth. iii. 18.

e Micah iv. 8.

people of worth, beyond the bounds of time, especially if they have been ours, is blessed hope. As length of days, to be useful, and having power, is no small privilege. Yet to be with CHRIST is far better ^c.

XXXI. ESAU AND HIS DESCENDANTS.

Chap. xxxvi. 8. *Thus dwelt Esau in Mount Seir. Esau is Edom.*

THE whole of this chapter is chiefly taken up with names; yet are they of use to the learned, who inquire after the origin of nations, and afford great credibility to our sacred writings. A few examples will be all that we need to mention. Esau's generations were sometimes termed Edomites ^f.

When the posterity of Esau left Canaan and went eastward, they seem to have divided into herds, or clans ^g.

His was the powerful Idumean band. Amalek was head of another ^h. Many of Esau's posterity became dukes, princes or governors of whole districts ⁱ. When the whole were met together, they formed an assembly of nobles; and must have been Strong. Seir was one of special distinction ^k. Anah was an early breeder of hardy mules, between the horse and ass. Other interpreters give to the word a different sense, not material.

Uz gave name to a whole country ^l. This lay in Arabia, the rocky. The Horites seem to have been ancestors of Seir ^m. Kings they became ⁿ, by election most of them, verse 35. Bozrah gave rise to a large city ^o.

Such was Esau in his descendants, while Jacob and his for a long while were sojourners. Yet soon were the words of Isaac to be made out. The prophecies of God receive their

^c 1 Thess. iv. 13. ^f Chap. xxvii. 29, 37. Ex. xvii. 8, &c.

^g Chap. xxxii. 3.—xxxiii. 14, 15. Josh. xxiv. 4.

^h Deut. xxii. 7. ⁱ Verse 15 &c. ^k Verse 20. ^l 1 Sam. iv. 21.

^m Verse 30. ⁿ Verse 31. ^o Isa. xxxiv. 6.—lxiii. 1.—xlix 13.

Ames i. 12.

fulfilment often by degrees, whence they do not soon become perceptible as they all will do, in the end. And thus, they become a clear standing evidence for divine revelation. How great are the advantages we enjoy, compared with an early state of the human kind? Warring among the uncivilized, has and ever likely will have place. The well taught are less liable to this. Compare the *British Kingdom* now, with what it has been, and give thanks to the MOST HIGH for strength, laws, religion and government.

XXXII. JOSEPH IS HATED OF HIS BRETHREN.

Chap. xxxvii. 4. *And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.*

TO say the least of Jacob's partiality for Joseph; he was imprudent in making it so obvious. The evil, however, seems to follow naturally, from the crime of having more wives at the same time than one. Certain states of human nature may extenuate, but can never apologize for such a dangerous trespass.

Joseph being now seventeen years old was feeding his father Jacob's flock, when he heard of the ill-will which the rest of his brethren bore to him. The same he did communicate to his indulgent parent, who, notwithstanding did honour him with a piece of dress, which they did all account peculiarly fine: whether from colour, or kind of stuff, makes no difference worthy of notice.

Some time after this, Joseph dreamed a dream of obvious interpretation to his advantage in future life, which most likely he was vain enough to speak of, and which led his brethren to hate him yet more. This was followed by a second, of similar ruling import. Symptoms of elation in the young breast, even Jacob strove to repress.

But what he soon forgot, the brethren did not. Only rankling envy was indulged by them. A dreadful foe both to
virtue

virtue and true happiness. They meditate what should prove a trembling lesson to the revengeful, throughout all ages. Jacob sends his darling to Shechem, where the rest were tending the herds of cattle, then their prime wealth. The youth doth promptly obey, with an engagement to return as soon as might be. At Shechem he is met by Simeon and Levi, a good man or angel, before this, directing his way ^a.

The father, through haste, seems to have been inattentive to both dreams, and the orders now given. It is specially humane to guide an anxious traveller ^b. Upon seeing Joseph, the envious brethren conspire to kill him; for who may stand before so cruel a *demon*? Falsehood and murder, deliberately meditated, fill the mind with horror. Let us slay a brother, and hide it if possible, by a shocking untruth ^c.

A Reuben, in part helps to relieve the reader's feelings here. He thinks of a deliverance, and proposes what might lead to it. That in place of an immediate murder, they might put him into a deep dry pit; designing somehow or other his rescue ^d. They strip the youth of his favourite coat, and follow out the measure proposed by Reuben. Nor crying, nor tears could prevent this. Infernal *fratricides* at bottom.

Yet as though they had done some affair of signal prowess, they sat down to eat a hearty meal. Meanwhile, lifting up their eyes, they beheld a company of *Ishmaelites*, yet unconquered descendants from one of that name, going to *Egypt*, with various merchant goods, carried by camels or dromedaries, certain of them both large and swift. To them they propose a sale of Joseph, if yet alive, at the motion of Judah, and in a speech most worthy of his line. To him the rest did hearken, and a bargain was struck: for in those infant days, were sales of men like beasts. The price of Joseph was forty pieces of silver. Marvellous divine interposition, and for ends that open to the admiration of all ages!

Reuben, blessed be his memory, had gone during this transaction, and found not his brother, which next to killed him with grief. His words are truly affecting! He rent his clothes,

^a Chap. xvi. 7.

^b Heb. i. 14.

^c Jo. viii. 44.

^d Verse 23.

and so forth. Being the eldest, he had the more to answer for.

They took, by joint agreement, Joseph's coat, killed one of the goats, and dipped the raiment in blood, on purpose to deceive Jacob, by saying, such were the remains of his favourite, who had been torn to pieces by some wild beast. Alas, poor Jacob, what a mournful affliction was this ! and how suitably expressed ? Mysterious heaven ! Help us to adore, till we can unravel. Parents learn to be impartial, and domestics all consider ^c.

XXXIII. JUDAH GROSSLY ERRS.

Chap. xxxviii. 26. *And Judah acknowledged them, and said, She hath been more righteous than I ; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son : and he knew her again no more.*

SOME sins are of so hateful a nature ; that, but for the authenticity of history, and by way of warning to others, they had been better not kept upon record. What concerns Judah here, seems to be of that kind.

He was none of the worst of Jacob's children, as appears from his pleading for Joseph's life. Yet first he married improperly one of the daughters of Canaan. Soon after he marries another of the same land ; and was a loser in character and ease by both.

One of his wicked sons by Shuah, the last of his wives, the LORD slew in his youth. And according to the custom of those ages, afterwards politically adopted by the law of Moses ; the next brother, in point of age, had to marry his widow, when left without children, to keep up the distinct lineage from Abraham : Which was contemptuously refused, and judicially punished as the former.

Tamar, now a widow to each of them, in the eye of law, waited till the next brother should come of years. Meanwhile, Judah's own wife dying, a stratagem is laid by Tamar

to have children by him ; and succeeds. The narrative must be referred to.

From an illicit conjunction, twins are produced ; and the evidence for their being Judah's could not but satisfy ; though prior to this, as a kind of magistrate, he ordains the transgressor of a clear customary law to be burned after her delivery. Herein he comes to own that the woman was more righteous than he. He was Shelah his third son-in-law, who was now grown up ; and himself had shamefully encouraged *barlotism*.

At length the *twin-brothers* are born, Pharez and Zarah ^a. The sons of Hirah, the Adullamite, became kings ^b. Unequal marriage connections notwithstanding are truly hazardous to both peace and virtue. Ungodliness, which seems to have been the ruling evil principle in both Er and Onan, is a meet instrument for committing the worst of crimes. Judah's children, being those of promise, were specially bound to be attentive, and owing to their neglect became monuments of divine justice. Those of many prayers and good education, have likewise much to answer for. Marriage, being sanctioned both by divine and human laws, is entitled to much respect ^c. Promises, relating to this matter, ought to be understood sacred. Tamar, therefore, though not to be vindicated, was more righteous than Judah ^d. Youthful family follies are too apt to be imitated, and should meet with a strong check in the beginning. A leading good example is inestimable.

XXXIV. JOSEPH ADVANCED AND TEMPTED.

Chap. xxxix. 3. *And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand.*

MORE varieties of PROVIDENCE are to be met with in this history of Joseph, than in most others of like

a 1 Chr. ii. from verse 3. Matth. ⁴ 1. b Josh. xii. 19. 1 Sam. xxii. 1, &c.

c Rom. xiii. 1, &c.

d Verse 11.

small compass. The narrative, at the same time, is plain and affecting throughout. By much the far greater part of those who imitate, have fallen short. Even Josephus, with all his best powers, doth not nearly equal Moses.

Occasional remarks, however, may be of good use to the unlearned. The sale of Joseph was amazingly overruled for benefit to thousands.

His virtue, in the beginning, is sorely tried. Potiphar, in high office under the king of Egypt, did purchase him; who was much esteemed for prudent and successful domestic services. He became a steward, or confidential overseer of the household. Almost every day his trust increased; and his fidelity was no less discernible. Hence, as in Joseph's case, the knowledge of true faith doth propagate.

At the same time, his goodly looks became a trial to him. His master's wife falls in love to a most criminal excess. One for the honour of the sex needs say no more. All her art and influence could not corrupt so devout a servant. Behold, said the hero of pious gratitude, my master, and so on. Read with care.

A triumph of prime magnitude! He would that instant fly from her presence, and did so, but she from disappointed lust, becomes a fury of revenge. Having put servants out of the way; she, by a series of artful evidence, has him cast into prison. LORD, would he now think, how unsearchable are thy judgements? His person and his character, still more precious, so causelessly injured. Yet we hear of no complaints. But, as Solomon says, jealousy is the rage of a man. A close and candid examination we are not to look for from such. A place of strong confinement was to be the lot for a time, of steadfast virtue, and among the worst of transgressors.

Happy they who are swift to hear in defence, agreeable to James i. 20, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

On the other hand, says the deep, penetrating Solomon, The lying tongue hateth him that is afflicted therewith. Anxious to justify any thing that is false, they scruple at no

evil *. Sworn partners to each other, cannot be too cautious^b. A sweet conciliating summary, and high recommendation to the honourable state !

XXXV. JOSEPH INTERPRETETH DREAMS.

Chap. xl. 5. *And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison.*

THE favour of God, every thing taken together, never leaves the good. A jailor becomes quite enamoured with the excellences of Joseph ; and commits unto him the care of all who, till then, were confined in prison. In one night, it would seem, the king's butler who lay there, and the baker too, did dream what made a deep impression upon each. Their supposed crimes might be of a heinous nature ; but of this we cannot be certain. They could not forget what had passed in sleep ; and became miserable for lack of an interpretation. They seemed to both, not casual, but ominous. A sad countenance was easily understood by Joseph ; and upon inquiry, they did open their minds more at large to him. Joseph then said, Does not interpretation of dreams, like yours, belong unto God ? Intimating, that he the Omniscient was one ; and softly insinuating a charge against their polytheism and idolatry.

Tell me them I pray you, and, if I obtain leave from him who is MOST HIGH, I will have it in my power to give you relief. And then, each told their dream ; which in their turns, ought to be read. Next, after a humble mental prayer, he said unto the late chief butler, in substance, that after the short space of three days, should Pharaoh lift up his head, by restoring him to all his former duties and privileges. Then adds, by way of request, that when these things did happen, he should think of him, and consider how it was that he was brought and sold into Egypt : and that, as before God he had done nothing worthy of so close imprisonment. That he had been

a Psal. cv. 8. 1 Peter ii. 11.

b 1 Peter iii. 1, &c.

stolen away was enough for humanity ; and did not upbraid those who had been the immediate means of it. Less from the butler he could not well ask.

As to the chief baker, his dream was more portentous and disagreeable ; behold I had three baskets, and so on : which Joseph, after devoutly musing, did thus interpret, that in so many days, Pharaoh, by his officers, would put him to death, and hang up his body to be devoured by the birds.

And, accordingly both did happen. The narrative should be here read.

What the crimes imputed to them were, doth only admit of conjecture ; not unlike, by poisoning, they might be understood as having a design against the king's life. Besides want of proof against the butler, it might be a practice then, as still in the east, for the cup-bearer to drink first. Bread did not admit of like trial, in each kind.

Yet ^a, did not the chief butler remember Joseph. How can we account for this ? A real blot of ingratitude fall upon such a character. Think here of Luke, Were there not ten cleansed ! Where are the nine. Cutting, yet mild ! Number us not, O God, with such ^b ! In cases of mutual human obligation, the most liberal acknowledgements are likewise due. He that hath friends should show himself friendly ; and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother ^c.

XXXVI. PHARAOH'S TWO DREAMS.

Chap. xli. 8. *And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled ; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof : and Pharaoh told them his dreams ; but there was none of them could interpret them unto Pharaoh.*

JOSEPH's deliverance out of prison was after so wonderful a manner as could not fail to be generally known. Not

^a Verse 23. ^b Gal. ii. 20. ^c 2 Cor. v. 14, 19. ^c Prov. iii. 26, 27.
Chap. xvii. 17, &c. ^c John iii. 18. Luke vi. 37.

less than two years from the time that Pharaoh's chief butler had been restored to office, the king dreamed as in the narrative ^a. When he awoke, his mind was under great agitation. It seemed to him, as intimating somewhat future and strange. The more that another not unsimilar was again distinctly set before him. Read what follows of the fat and lean kine. Such an impression both together made, as did trouble him exceedingly. He sent for those in his land who were understood to have skill in explaining such matters ; but could get no satisfaction. All their pretences to divine, by magical arts, did fail them.

At length the chief butler recollecting Joseph, after an honest confession of his fault with regard to him, he is sent for^b. The king's heart being full, is immediately opened to him. The pious soul ascribes what ever knowledge he had, to One only the living and true God ; whom he did reverently worship. Depending upon this, in the time of the king's narrative, the interpretation thereof is communicated to him : and should now be read from the scripture account of it ; denoting seven years of plenty, to be followed by as many years of great want. The doubling of the dream, as to its import, was to signify how certain the fulfilment would be.

Next, he advises the king how to act, and is heard with approbation^c. Trusting to the spirit of God that was in Joseph ; he is forthwith employed to execute his own scheme for the public good. And he took off his ring, and put it upon Joseph's hand, with many other signal marks of honour. All which ought to be well attended to, from the account given by Moses. Such an humble soul might not be desirous of these, but the will of a king, and the customs of a country, when not unlawful, should be submitted to. Even to the best of principles, however, it was a temptation to inordinate self-complacence.

The change of his name to *Zaphnath-paaneah*, and his marriage to Asenath, are likewise rehearsed. Being now in prime of life^d, he is quite in condition for travel, and other necessary labour. Both dreams are accomplished to a letter.

^a Chap xli. 2, &c.

^b Verse 14.

^c Verse 37, &c.

^d Verse 26.

When the earth brought forth in handfulls, stores are then laid up for the years of famine. Before this last, he had born to him two sons; in each of their names expressing a wisely devout temper, which was indeed his superlative excellence and joy.

For the sake of the young people, it should be observed, that, upon the annual overflow of the large river Nile, running through Egypt from south to north, depends their plenty, or want. A singular kind Providence of God to a land whence rain is withheld; save in the distant mountains where it falls in cataracts, which give rise to the inundations yearly. Such is the case too, with many other low lying countries of the earth besides Egypt.

Affected magical spells, and pretences of every kind to fortune-telling, should at all times, and every where, be held as impious. Known unto God only are all his works from the beginning. All in the end will be found to have wrought together for good to the upright ^e.

XXXVII. JACOB'S SONS SENT TO EGYPT.

Chap. xlii. 3. *And Joseph's ten brethren went down to buy corn in Egypt.*

THE famine predicted by Pharaoh's dreams, did affect neighbouring lands to that of Egypt; then, and still understood to be a kind of granary ^f. Father Jacob sends his sons, with money, to be relieved from starving. So the whole went down to that low and better provided land. Only Benjamin, Joseph's next nighest brother, Jacob sent not; being young for travel, and necessary for himself. See the history.

Arriving at the royal city, Joseph's brethren beg leave of him to purchase; in a manner unwittingly fulfilling ^g. Soon as he saw their faces, he knew them, but did not make it known to any. So far from this, he appeared as strange, and spake roughly to them as spies. A heavy hard business to one, so

^e Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

^f Chap. xli. 57.

^g Chap. xxxvii. 7.

naturally

naturally mild. Their return was just what he expected. Still, however, to try them, and with no small difficulty to himself; you may have said what in part is true, but not the whole. By the life of Pharaoh, whose land you now tread upon, ye shall not each of you go forth hence, till the youngest brother is brought, as a completing evidence to your veracity. Go one of you, and till then, the rest shall abide here in prison. Joseph's manner looks as though he swore; but it is made use of only in compliance with a strong customary averment, importing an obligation to protect their sovereign. Falsehood, in such case, was punishable with death.

For three days he shuts them up, by order, in one prison-ward; where they had time to recollect, and improve from their past misconduct. On the third day, he said unto them, let one of your brethren be bound here; and the rest return with such supply as you need: only come not back, without the youngest. And they did so; not a little vexed with consciousness of former guilt; saying, as in verse 21, we saw the anguish of a brother's soul, and that unmoved: therefore is all this come upon us. Reuben wisely heightens their sorrow, for the sake of their amending as much as it was possible. Ah, and wo is us, for a brother's blood must now be avenged!

Joseph who, before this, had spoken to them by an interpreter, needed none at present; and great must his tender sympathies have been. He turned from them, and wept. Without a discovery as yet, he takes Simeon from them as an hostage, binding him, by appointment, before their eyes.

Observe how prudently hitherto Joseph did conduct himself. He does what was proper, and no more, to bring offenders to repentance. With how much resolution too, does he overcome the workings of natural love? What inexpressible yearnings must he have felt? Still his sense of duty surmounts the demands of immediate ease. Magnanimous to a wonder! In all a pattern! How often too, doth divine wisdom punish cruel guilt in its own way? They are blessed who receive correction with patience, and ingenuous amendment. Conscience is a faithful monitor. It will not, cannot easily

repress;

repress ; but witnesses to the last, for ALMIGHTY GOD, against the transgressor. A dreadful portion !

XXXVIII. JACOB'S SONS RETURN TO EGYPT.

Chap. xlii. 36. *And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children : Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me.*

THE servants of Joseph had it in command, to fill each sack brought by the sons of his father with corn ; and otherwies amply to provide for them. Their money in particular was returned. Read the narrative.

One of the brethren opening his sack for provender, sees the money at its mouth, with surprise and dread. Looking upon it as a presage of some new and greater trial than ever. And thus by a further discovery of the like, were they all affected. Rehearsing the same, when at home, to Jacob, with a full account of what had happened ; and in particular, how Simeon had been kept as an *hostage*, till Benjamin should be sent. He is hardly able to support it. Me ye have bereaved, verse 36, and what follows, is truly pathetic. Concluding too hastily, that all was against him.

How imperfect is our knowledge of DIVINE PROVIDENCE ! All was then doing the best for him. Reuben's return is strong, but quite unsatisfactory ; for what could the slaying of two grand children do, but embitter life the more ? Judah, giving the aged father time to cool, argues the matter in a much more sensible way : That unless Benjamin went with them, they need not come to Egypt again for food, or even expect to see the chief ruler's face.

The alternative was dreadful ! But how much preferable to hazard onelife, than all perish ? At length the patriarch yields, and then directs his sons to a civil custom of the east, by ac-

costing superiors with presents. The Scripture account is beautifully simple. Do this, and so forth ^b. Take also your brother. And GOD ALMIGHTY, in whose hands are the hearts of the greatest, give you mercy before the man. If otherwise, I submit. Admirable instructive resignation! Do what is possible, and leave the issues to infinite love!

Thus equipped, the sons of Jacob went successfully on to Egypt, and stood before Joseph, in his chamber of audience. And when he saw Benjamin, he orders a dinner for the whole. Still however, conscience operating, they are afraid, lest an accusation of one kind or other might be brought against them. They magnify every circumstance into a matter of horror. Addressing themselves at the door, to the steward of Joseph's house, they explain to him as they could, the money found by each of them in their sacks, and how willing they now were to pay at large for the whole. And he being a pious man, like his master, soothes them by the regard they had for their GOD, to be less alarmed than hitherto. Then bringing Simeon out unto them unbound, and decently clothed, he gives more hope for peace than ever.

In Joseph's house, they want for no sign of true hospitality. Caring by proper servants, for their *beasts of carriage*. And soon as the *Ruler* came in, respectfully bowed themselves, and next producing their venerable father's presents: these he did welcome, and asks of his welfare. To each question, they still answer, with much polite obeisance. Directing his eye to Benjamin, his own mother's son, he asks if this was he? And unable to refrain himself, he said, GOD be gracious unto thee, my son! The sequel must be left to private perusal. He sought where to weep, and he did so aloud, in his own chamber.

Recollect attentively. Thy faithfulness, O GOD, reacheth unto the clouds ^c. Let us all learn a patient waiting for the issues of things, if we would draw right conclusions. Revolve at leisure ^d.

^b Compare Chap. xxxvii. 25.

^c Chap. xlii. 6.

Compare Rom. xi. 36.

^d Rom. xii. 20.

XXXIX. JOSEPH'S POLICY.

Chap. xliv. 2. *And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack's mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken.*

IT may be thought wonderful, the tenderness of Joseph for Benjamin, being considered as above set forth, how he could act as follows. Read here the order given to his steward, beginning with these words, *Fill the men's sacks.* And which order was instantly obeyed. Soon as morning came, the whole brethren are sent away, and with no small joy. But when they were not yet afar off, they were overtaken by servants, and searched. Joseph's cup is found in the sack of Benjamin, as if it had been stolen by him. The guilt is enlarged upon, and with great feasibility. It is spoken of still for trial, as a *divining cup*, by means whereof he could discover both men and things. The brethren are quite confounded, when the alleged crime is distinctly proven. Their reasoning before this should be read, and cannot fail to affect much.

As a *felon*, they now conceive that Benjamin must die, or become a bondman for life. Tremendous state of suffering ! Their own sentence is against them ; and in all the simplicity of innocence it had been set forth. The thief alone shall be brought back, and the rest be allowed to proceed. Read for the search made, from verse 12, and think of their feelings, when the cup was found. They rent their clothes, and no wonder, in the distraction of grief.

The sequel contains a mixture of the melancholy and joyous, without a parallel. It were by far too much, to attempt a comment ^a. Let this be done by every one's own mind. When returned, they prostrate themselves. Accomplishing once more ^b. Joseph, for a while, assumes an air of high displeasure. To this Judah replies as he could, What shall we say, *my lord* ? And so on. He acknowledges iniquity of a different kind ; and that God had found it out, to punish

^a from Verse 14.

^b Chap. xlii. 6.

them ^c. Though not the eldest, he is wise, brave and eloquent. The method of his questioning is full of *pathos*. The heroic brother makes a most sensible, and in part encouraging reply. Get you up in peace unto your father.

Then adventuring nearer to the offended, Judah begs to be heard a word, and gets permission. The scripture account is superlatively fine; an old man, and a child of his old age, were inimitable excellences of speech, with what follows.

And if ye take this also from me, ye shall bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Melting rehearsal! For indeed his life is bound up in him. If he see that the lad is not with us, he will die. O do, but let me be thy servant in his stead, and let the lad go up. True filial affection, and grandeur of soul! I can be a slave, or do any thing, rather than witness a dear aged father's death, by heart-break. As complete in sense, as it was generous.

Taking the whole together, we find that stratagems for advantage to others, are not only pardonable, but good. Such is the ground of most *parables, metaphors and similitudes*. The full truth, in some situations of mind, cannot be borne. Divination, as signifying to foretell what is future, is impious, and not as expressive of prudential measures taken. See the margin. It may be often expedient, to try human affections, before we trust them ^d.

XL. JOSEPH MADE KNOWN TO HIS BRETHREN.

Chap. xlv. 3. *And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph: Doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him: for they were troubled at his presence.*

FEW pieces of history are more affecting and instructive, than what follows. Joseph's stratagem had answered to a wish. Its effects, at first, were grief and confusion, out of which the sons of Jacob are gradually recovered.

^c Compare now Chap. xliii. 9.

^d See Psal. xxxiv. 11, &c.

Joseph gave orders to have every man sent out, and then made himself known : Weeping aloud. And soon as he could articulate, said, I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live ? Conscious unutterable distress, in such a moment, could not miss to be felt. And he said further, brethren, come near to me I pray. I am indeed your brother whom ye sold ; but under DIVINE permission to save life. Be not grieved. Illustrious man ! Deep sense of guilt is an affecting object. Weeping and crying for a time, must have their freedom. Then much soothing is due to upright penitence.

Pardoning can never detract from greatness ; but the reverse. It assimilates to OMNIPOTENT grandeur. It was GOD did send me, and let this be your consolation. Devout as benevolent ! Much of the awful experienced famine is yet to come. Be at peace in yourselves, and no less with one another. Remember, I charge you again and again, that GOD sent me. It was not you indeed, as chief. And the same ALMIGHTY SOVEREIGN hath made me even as a father to Pharaoh : nor hath he been wanting in gracious returns. I am *lord* of his house, and so forth.

Haste you hence, go up to my dear aged father ; and say unto him, thy son Joseph liveth. Yet do not tarry, but come with all your children, and dwell in the *land of Goshen*, quiet, fruitful, and not distant from me. Bring your flocks also, for it will please his Majesty. Meanwhile see in every part of me, your much and justly beloved mother's son. Nor have I forgot her and your language. Use every argument from my power, and interest with the king, to quicken my aged parent hither.

And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept in joy ; as did Benjamin upon his. Moreover, he kissed all his brethren, and wept in thorough reconciliation upon each of them. In familiar talk, after some composure, they would no doubt acknowledge wherein they had done amiss.

And the fame of this whole transaction was heard in Pharaoh's house. Nothing for a time was so much spoken of ; and the prince, above most others, was glad : Saying unto Jo-

seph, this do ye, lade their beasts forthwith, by the servants you have, and engage them solemnly to return from *Canaan*, with all that they have. They shall have every thing good here, which our land doth yield.

Waggons too, provide for speedy transportation hither. All which was done. To the whole he gave changes of raiment ; but to Benjamin he gave five, with three hundred pieces of silver. And to his father, he sent a large supply. See the history itself. Prior to departing, he renews his charge, not to fall out by the way, neither on account of things past, nor present. Envy and discord are the bane of all true enjoyment.

Mysterious often are the ways of heaven, yet always equal. Clouds of darkness are sure to dissipate sooner or later. Rest in the LORD, and do not fret. Mutual differences are fraught with some of the sorest evils. The sooner breaches are made up, so much the better^a.

PART THIRD.

TILL THE DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT BY THE PASSING THROUGH THE RED SEA.

I. JACOB COMFORTED.

Chap. xlv. 28. *And Israel said, It is enough ; Joseph my son is yet alive : I will go and see him before I die.*

UPON receiving the first accounts of Joseph's being in life, whom he had long supposed to be torn in pieces,
by

^a Matth. v. 9. John iv. 7.

by some wild beast, Jacob did faint ; so as to be for a time quite insensible. At length he is able to attend evidence ; and said, it is enough for enjoyment : Joseph, my very dear son, is yet alive : all that now remains is to see him before I die.

And, without delay, he took his journey to Beersheba, on his way to Egypt. Here he had formerly built an altar, for religious worship ; and did now offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and is graciously accepted. The scripture narrative should here be read. He is encouraged to go on ; and a promise before made is repeated to him, in visions of the night : Nor should he die, till he saw his beloved son. Thus under heavenly guidance, he went forward ^a ; arriving at Egypt safe.

The names of those who went with him may be read ^b : In number three score and ten. Judah is sent to intimate this, by a polite, yet simple address ; that his brother Joseph might meet them at Goshen : which was quietly executed in all its parts.

Soon as he came in sight of the venerable father, they embraced and wept. Israel, in rapture, said, now let me die, at divine pleasure, since I have seen thy face. To me, this is the summit of earthly joy ! But he was yet to live happier than at this time, he could possibly imagine. He next informs his father and brethren, that they must be introduced to his benevolent king ; and request his good leave to continue them, in their old and favourite shepherd occupation. They were to let Pharaoh know so much from themselves.

It was a manner of life in no high esteem among the Egyptians ; and, of course, least liable to envy. The part that would be allotted for them, was sweet and rich in grass.

Joseph's account to the king may be read ^c ; then he presented before him five of his brethren ; whose answers were such, as all the rest had agreed upon. They claim nothing by way of right ; but as having his permission. Goshen, as their choice, they were to dwell in ; with an ample reward to care for his cattle, along with their own.

Jacob next introduced, did bless the king with prayers for

^a Chap. xlv. 5.

^b Chap. xlv. from verse 8.

^c Chap. xlvii. 1, &c.

his continued health and happiness ; acknowledges the length of his own sojourn-life, to have been an hundred and thirty years : few in comparison of antediluvian longevity, and but too often evil, as a sinner, and variously tried with afflictions. Thus went he back from his truly gracious majesty, to his destined portion of land ; where was Ramases, a city of some note, and having many advantages from Joseph ; who was as a second parent to them all.

Joseph still continues the faithful royal steward, as to money and goods of every kind.

The purchase of Egyptian fields may be thought hard ; but what were those to life ! Moreover he had the whole in trust. Nor could they exist better than under such a prince. It might be of foreseen use too, for the multitude, naturally unsteadfast, when the times should be more plenteous. Different removes seem to signify such an apprehension. Political wisdom is a deep study. The lands of the priests, according to some ; nobles and princes, according to others ; were not alienable, but left as Joseph found them : A yet more obvious measure for public peace.

Seed-corn was reserved for the year following the last of famine. The hand of God being conspicuous throughout. Great characters in high life, are above all value.

II. JACOB PROPHESETH.

Chap. xlix. 1, &c. *And Jacob called unto him his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.*

WHEN good old Israel felt in himself, that his latter end was nigh ; and being told that Joseph and his two sons were come to comfort him : He exerted his strength to the utmost, and sat up on his bed. Then rehearsed various particulars of his life. These should now be read from the word.

After

After this, addressing himself to Joseph, concerning his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh, as his own, no less than Reuben and Simeon ; he meant to leave them a like inheritance. And requesting that they should be brought near, he blessed them, as in verse 5, thanking God for what had befallen him, through Joseph's means. He took his two children between his knees, bowed down, and kissed them. Both kneeling, he laid his right hand upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left upon Manasseh's, not through inadvertance, but of design, and affectionately prays for both. The passage is tender, and should be read with care. He thus, in effect, did solemnly adopt them to be chiefs like the rest, of subsequent tribes. The number of those who should descend from them, were to increase like the fishes of the sea. See the margin.

Joseph takes some thought about a seeming preference given to Ephraim, as last born of the two. But the direction appears to have been supernatural, and is submitted to. They were both to be a kind of standard to future ages, for blessing ; which among the Jews is said to be continued still. See the text ^a.

Next he addresses Joseph, and in the name of the Most HIGH, with signal promises ^b. Behold I die, and so forth. A double portion was to be his, and that in the land whither he, in his posterity, was to return. Jacob or Israel, after this proceeds to speak with and for his other sons ^c. Recommending attention to each, as the words of a dying parent. Reuben was to be of excellent power. Throughout this, and what follows, the style is understood to be elevated, poetical, and sometimes pathetic, or moving. In the main, though not without blame, he was famous. His want of stability, however, was a great defect.

Simeon and Levi were brethren indeed, but in a bad sense, likewise of that expression. And much to Jacob's honour, smartly alluded to in his address. O my soul, come not into their secret. I will divide them, as a prophet, and scatter them.

^a Heb. x. 24.

^b Compare Chap. xlviii. 21.

^c Chap. xlix. 1, &c.

Judah, thou art he, whom thy brethren shall praise, as doth thy very name, to wit, excellence, import ^d ; They shall bow down to thee, even as his enemies must. But what softens the idea of warlike strength ^e, is the sceptre, that is, the chief ruling power, shall not depart from thee, till Shiloh come, the great, the peace-making MESSIAH. Accomplished to astonishment, when Herod, an Idumean, at the birth of CHRIST, filled the throne ; his dominion was divided, and not long after, the whole Jewish polity overthrown ; where idolatrous heathens, becoming converts to true faith, were gathered in to their room.

Prior to all this, indeed, binding, with Benjamin and Levi, as opposed to Israel, the ten revolting tribes, his foal unto the vine ; he did wash his garments, so to speak, in wine, from its plenty, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. All, in Judea, which they had left, common as hedge produce, and to which the very lowest animals are tied. His eyes shall be sparkling red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

Zebulun shall dwell in the haven of the sea, near the lake of Genesareth ; and he shall be for ships westward, to the well known ports of Tyre and Sidon, through time. How minutely descriptive is this foresight ?

Issachar is as a strong ass ; declining neither possible burden to bear, nor hard rustic labour ; and he saw what was pleasant, yet patiently did bow down his shoulders : became a tributary servant. Husbandry he did prefer to lucrative merchandise.

Dan shall judge his people by law, and avenge wrongs, as did Samson. He shall be subtile as a serpent, to bite at proper times. Such deliverers to Israel, in his posterity, shall not be wanting ; so as to render the well behaving part of them thankful.

As for Gad, a troop of invaders shall frequently overcome him ; yet he in the end shall conquer.

Out of Asher shall proceed fulness of support, and of the best kinds. Royal fruit dainties.

Naphtali is as a hind let loose ; full of liberty, and taking

ranges of delight. He giveth, at the same time, goodly words. Both essential to the wise dispatch of business.

Joseph is a fruitful bough ; young, vigorous, and widely extending. The archers have sorely grieved him ; but his bow, as hitherto, abode in strength ^a.

Benjamin shall raven, &c. strong, and making sure of his prey. In the morning, &c. Read the text.

The more attentively we peruse these prophecies, and compare them with subsequent historical accounts ; the more we will admire the spirit of God in them ; and be affected with the venerable Patriarch's calmness, verse 29. Envious case verily ^b. Jacob, though not perfect, was upright ; and died in peace with a forgiving God. So may we ^c.

III. JACOB'S FUNERAL.

Chap. l. 5. — *Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again.*

OUR natural affections, when not carried to excess, are lawful. They require, notwithstanding, an enlightened mind to guide them. Pious Joseph, after his father's death, could fall upon his face, kiss him, and weep. He forgets not, however, other decencies ; to embalm the precious relics, according to custom of the great. Who would not, if they had such means in their power ? Dust itself is dear to tender love. Yet imitation of excellence is infinitely preferable. Days for public mourning too are not to be blamed.

Joseph, after three score and ten days of this kind, besought leave from Pharaoh, to do the last duty ; which was granted. Both are pleasantly narrated, and have their use ; to condescend to, and encourage fidelity.

He facilitates the like measure to his brethren and all their connections. The pomp was great, and becoming one next to the king. On their way, and at the threshing-floor of

^a Verse 24, &c.

^b Psal. xxxvii. 37.

^c Prov. xiv. 32.

Jude 24, 25.

Atad, they gently desire his leave to rest ^d. Allowance being hospitably given; here they give a new and general vent to grief; perhaps using minstrels, as afterwards, to aid funeral songs. A memorial cairn too might be collected, termed Abel-mizraim, or the Mourning of the Egyptians.

Hence they go on to the field of Machpelah, where was the burying grave purchased by Abraham; and now the last filial duty was performed. The brethren of Joseph, as was natural, recollecting, at his departure from them to Egypt, how his presence, hitherto, had kept them all in good temper, they became affraid of evils formerly done, and contentions to follow: as also, that the noble hero hitherto, unawed by a father's decease, might come to hate them; they ask his forgiveness by the memory of a father.

He weeps from gratitude to heaven, and sweet recollected parental love; and when he could speak, obtests them no longer to fear. His words should be attentively pondered, as pious and grand. None but the brave, from religious principle, could so express themselves. Fear conscience, and distrust not the good. Least of all, that which is infinite, after true penitence.

Joseph did so comfort them, as to reach their hearts. See the margin. Not all his advancement, prior to this, could render him so illustrious. He returns to dwell in Egypt; where the greater part of his father's family likewise did yet abide; and that, till he came to a good old age, an hundred and ten. He just before his death collects those of the brethren and their families, who were yet alive; assures them, by a spirit of prophecy, that they would soon be visited with sore trials, but meet in time, with a proper deliverance. He took an oath, moreover, that they would carry up his bones from thence, to be deposited with those of his fathers. See for accomplishment ^e.

So Joseph died, and they did embalm him; and put his mummied body into a coffin, for a lodgement in some sepulchral niche. Tender words and manners, when like as his were, are not below the most dignified. Funeral decencies

^d Judges ix. 14.

^e Acts vi. 16.

should suggest good preparations of mind for dying. Undue expence is needless ; as is waiting, without grief. Blessed are all who know how to forgive ^a.

IV. THE ISRAELITES CRUELLY OPPRESSED.

EXODUS i. 8. *Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.*

ALL the promises of God are sure to be fulfilled in the end ; though certain steps toward this, may seem inexplicable at the time.

In Goshen, the children of Israel became prosperous and multiplied exceedingly ^b. Hence Egyptian envy was provoked ; under a new king, who laid not to heart the great services of Joseph. He resolves to act, as thought by his counsellors, wisely, that is, in fact, cruelly towards them ; for putting a stop to their increase. See the scripture narrative. Sound policy would have followed out quite a different measure. At all events the counsel of the LORD must stand. They are now beginning to dig a pit for their own ruin ^c. Deliverance is wrought for Israel, by leave given to depart out of Egypt ; whence the book of Exodus takes its name : and which history, to building of the Tabernacle, fills up a space of no less than one hundred and forty-five years. From seventy in number, as appears from verse 1st, &c. they were in the space of eighty years, no less than six hundred thousand ^d ; and still increasing ^e.

A timid and voluptuous people are soon alarmed. They now set on foot a grievous oppression, under severe task-masters ; obliging the people of Israel to build two large cities : Pithom ; the Pelusium of Ezekiel xxx. 15. a kind of key to Egypt, says an ancient heathen ; and Rameses, in Goshen ^f ; both to be fortified, and works of immense difficulty.

^a James ii. 13. Eph. v. 1, 2.

^b Verse 7.

^c See Psal. vii. 14, 15.

^d Chap. xii. 37.

^e Compare Num. i. 45, 46.

^f Gen. xlviii. 11.

Still, however, the afflicted grew a sore mortification to their foes. Therefore they add to the above new rigour, with yet more odious task-masters. They must work in mortar, and in brick, under a hot sun ; so as to make their lives bitter, yea, humble to name. Two of the chief Hebrew women, whose office it was to assist at child-bearing, Shiphrah and Puah, were to kill their male children, soon as born : whence their decrease would become unavoidable ; the more so, as the Hebrew women would not soon intermarry with Egyptian idolaters. Hideous mandate !

Yet doth God make the very wrath of man praise him. Some good people, in the very worst of times may be found. The women above named did fear God, and could not be unnatural. They parry for a while, the charge laid in against them, by telling the truth in part, though not the whole : nor were they unrewarded.

A savage mandate is then issued out, to kill every male-child of Israel, when found by one or other of his people, by casting them into the large deep river Nile, at hand. Envy, led on by despotism, would not be remiss. And now Israel's deliverer was to be born. A man of the house of Levi, by a daughter of the same family, had a son exceeding fair ; and whom they could not think to adventure abroad, even in the mother's arms ; and whom they found means to hide for three months.

But the jealous cruel eye is ever on the watch. It became, therefore, needful to part with him ; though not to an immediate sanguinary hand. By an impulse of heaven, probably, they contrive to put the dear babe into an ark, or chest of woven bulrushes, and somehow pitched with bituminous matter ; both in great plenty there. This they laid by the river side, and among thick leafy flags. His sister, moreover, viewing the whole at some distance.

Providentially the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe, where, most likely, a shade had been erected for royal accommodation. Such measure for health, in a warm country, was most requisite. She sees the ark, has it brought to her, by

one of her servants, and is enamoured by the beauty of what it contained. A weeping goodly babe became quite irresistible. Her compassion soon explains the affair to her own mind. It is one of the Hebrew children. Then beckoning to the sister, the princess is moved to have such an infant sweetness taken care of. The sister, full of good sense or instruction, said, shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women? Quite answerable to her wish. And the maid went, and called the child's own mother; to whom, royal-like, the wisest, benevolent instructions are given. A short, but most agreeable bargain ensues. And the child grew, and was brought to Pharaoh's daughter; who took him to herself as a son; calling his name Moses, or one drawn out. Sweetly expressive! Thus stands the origin of that most justly celebrated Jewish deliverer in time, by celestial guidance. A pleasing interlude!

What a hideous idea does that of unprincipled barbarism offer? How miserable the people who have despotism to conflict with? What an abatement of human suffering has been our gracious gospel^b? Most devoutly to be requested for to all! How thankful should Britain's Empire be, for a mild command; and laws of mutual unanimity and love^c?

V. MOSES FLIES FROM EGYPT.

Chap. ii. 15. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well.

FROM the favour shewed to Moses, and the certain account he had of his real origin, and how he stood connected with the Hebrews; he soon took a great interest in them; and with foreseen trouble to himself. Going out when he was of age, he saw an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, on purpose to kill him, and slew the obvious aggressor. On another day, he beheld two of the Hebrews themselves striving

^b Psal. lxxxix. 15, &c.

^c John xiii. 17.

together;

together; and said to the one whom he knew to be in the fault, wherefore smitest thou thus thy fellow? And he resented with anger; putting him in mind of what he had so lately done to the Egyptian. See the scripture narrative. The prime movers in a quarrel, are ever the most irreconcilable.

Moses, prudent as he was brave, took the measure of flight. Pharaoh, in his haste, determines to slay him; who, by this time, was out of his reach, in the land of Midian. By the side of a well, where he abode for some time, he is highly patronised by divine justice^d. More had been revealed to him, than others knew of; or, at least, did seriously consider. In a retired place, he would give himself much to meditation and prayer.

He must have had, after all, deep and painful musings of mind; partly of a private, but oftener of a pure patriotic cast. Upon an occasion, narrated with great and beautiful simplicity, as the Midian daughters came to draw water, they were opposed by shepherds who lived not far from them; these Moses withstood, which highly pleased Reuel, their father, so that he sought, and found him out. A scripture perusal here, will be amply rewarded. Hospitality and gratitude shine forth from it.

Now full forty years of age, he has granted unto him Ziporah to be his wife, who bare to him a son, called Gershom, importing, stranger. She was a priest's daughter of that country; some say, a princess. See the margin. Nor was the match unequal, for he had been princely educated, and might soon be known. Moses too, was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, at this time the most civilized nation in the world.

It would seem^e, that some of Abraham's posterity did dwell here. Whence it is natural to conclude, that, as yet, some just knowledge of the true God might exist among them; from which, both civil justice and right worship would be carried on. Minds unaccustomed to thought, however, are but too apt to degenerate. To defend the injured argues great-

^d See Acts vii. 25.

^e Gen. xxv. 2.

ness of soul. The brave are seldom wrathful. A reward in time such do often meet with, as in ^a. The thankful cannot be at ease, without acknowledgment.

The cry of Israel's oppression is heard, so as to obtain for them deliverance. That king dies who had resolved to slay Moses, and another might not think of it. God is said to look upon his people in scripture, sometimes by way of favour, and sometimes displeasure. He cannot forget; but by a change of measures, he does what men do, after recollection ^b. When God delays the execution of his purposes, it is always for the wisest of reasons ^c.

VI. GOD APPEARETH UNTO MOSES.

Chap. iii. 2. *And the Angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.*

IN one of the most retired of the desarts, Moses came to the mountain of God, even Horeb, whence he was to be chosen, like David, afterwards to carry on a great and difficult leading ^d.

Here, as in verse 2, the Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses, in a *burning bush, yet not consumed*. Fit emblem of what he had to accomplish. Besides literal angels, various outward signs have the same name; and whereby God himself is chiefly to be understood. So says the learned *Jewish* interpreter *Maimonides*.

Moses resolves to go yet more nigh, and see a thing so uncommon. A mark of curiosity indeed, but of no less fortitude. Think now of ^e. The LORD by the *angel of his presence*, calls upon him, and said, draw not nigh, and so forth. Read at leisure what follows. Keep your distance for a while, and take time to compose yourself. Thus did the priests af-

^a Matth. v. 5. ^b Psal. xxxvii. ^c Compare Psal. xi. ult. xxxiv. 11, &c. ^d Psal. lxxviii. 70.
^e Isa. lxiii. 9.

terwards cast off their shoes ^c. Rashness is unsuitable to a devout employment.

The words ^d are comprehensive and solemn. I am the God of thy father, and the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. To be a God to each, was to be a benefactor ^e. Whence too, a short and conclusive argument for their now blessed existing state ^f. How could he be a benefactor to the insensible ?

Humility, submission and reverence, are all expressed next, by the manner of Moses, at so wonderful a DIVINE manifestation ^g.

The voice from out of the bush, opens the purpose upon which he was to be sent ^h. Consider this attentively. They import Divine pity for Israel, and an immediate relief, whereof himself was to be made the instrument. The words, see, hear, and know, are all used after the manner of men, and denote certainty. So likewise come down, is no more than to enter upon action. Israel was to be brought into a delicious fruitful land, and well watered ; and a people, the cup of whose iniquity was filled up, were to be extirpated ⁱ.

Come and I will send thee unhurt to Pharaoh : at once to avenge what is past, and to deliver thy people.

How crowded seemingly after all, with dangers to fulfil ! Even the fortitude of Moses is here put to a trial. LORD, who am I, to go to Pharaoh ? And so on. Read the scripture narrative.

How amazing are the changes in human life ! But to God these belong ^k. It is pleasant and beneficial often to be alone. To those who improve by solitude, God is gracious. Hence, a rural life is peculiarly sweet, to an enlightened mind. There may be trials to both private persons and communities, which terminate well ; and in this hope, should be patiently submitted to ^l. Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD ^m.

^c See Eccl. v. i. ^d Verse vi. ^e Heb. xi. 16. ^f Matth. xxii. 31.

^g Compare 1 Kings xix. 13. ^h Isa. vi. 2. ⁱ Verse 7.

^j Compare Gen. xv. 18. ^k See Luke i. 49. ^l Psal. xxxvii. 1, &c.---33.

^m Jude 24, 25.

VII. TOKENS TO MOSES FROM GOD.

Chap. iii. 14. *And GOD said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: And he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

AS the servant of the LORD drew nigh to see the burning bush, a voice called to him from thence; announcing at the same time, who he was, and his purpose to deliver Israel. Further, that Moses himself was to be the instrument of this. To expressions of deep and just humility, GOD said, in plain terms, I will be with thee, and to this very mountain shalt thou, with the emancipated people, come and worship. Other and more particular tokens are given him, as that he should open his message to his brethren in Egypt first, under this new and wonderfully comprehensive name, I AM THAT I AM, hath sent me unto you. That is, he who is in, and of himself, or necessarily existing. The same as in ^a. Agreeable to others, the *translation* should rather be, *I shall be what I shall be*; to wit, in the way of accomplishing what has been so often promised. Ever true to my word.

Either way, it is but one *Being* who speaks, and *he infinitely perfect*. Simply to be, is what belongs to no other. Compare with this, another admirable description ^b. A name so regularly transmitted, would have powerful effect. From a *Midianite* stranger so much the more. Astonishingly wise!

Moreover, GOD spake to Moses as in verse 15 of our chapter, and to be carefully read. Trust therefore, in the *Great I AM, and shall be*. Go, proceeds the narrative, gather the elders, &c. That is, their heads of tribes, and best instructed. Let them know of my approaching merciful visitation. The whole, from scripture, ought to be attentively perused.

Be assured, the people in time will be persuaded; and that with them consenting, thou shalt be able to face the king, as

^a Gen. xv. 7.----xviii. 1.

^b James i. 17.

their principal speaker, and as messenger from the LORD God of the *Hebrews*.

Your first desire shall be to go with them three days journey into the wilderness, for worship. The king will refuse, till after various successive judgements brought upon him. The *Hebrews* at first, might think no more than of the short space taken notice of. Regal obstinacy did enlarge that time, and a great deal more of unexpected good bring them to enjoy^d.

To convince Pharaoh, as to his by-past manifold and ungrateful evils, continues the same *Celestial voice*, I will stretch out my hand of irresistible power, and smite the *Egyptians*, till in the end they are obliged to let you go.

And it shall come to pass, that when ye depart thence, it shall not be in want. You and the people are hereby allowed to borrow from the *Egyptians* what, in part at least, is due to you, by past services. Simply the word will bear to be translated, to ask or beg.

What these things were, are condescended upon at large, in the scripture history, and may easily be understood. They were all things proper to attend their solemn religious feast with. Thus too, were wages to be paid, and *Egypt* in part spoiled of its wealth; though neither of these last might be in the design of Israel, but fell out by a subsequent cruel pursuit. Very different this, from borrowing with a view never to return. The *Hebrew* conduct was agreeable to the rules of strict law and equity. Truth is sacred, and avoids whatever is ambiguous. Neither has any one a right to judge in their own cause. Chapters xi and xii, will help to explain our subject.

Sentences of justice, delayed in their execution, render punishment more severe at last. It is like treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath. Speedy repentance is our best security, who are chargeable with guilt. Much time hereafter may not be allowed. Pharaoh did harden, and in the end undo himself. Divine mercy and truth are sure grounds of

^d Compare Chap. v. 1.

trust^a. Ambassadors like Moses should be familiarly acquainted with God's names and attributes. Others can be but of little or no service.

VIII. MOSES ENTERS UPON HIS MISSION.

Chap. iv. 8. *And it shall come to pass, if they will not believe thee, neither hearken to the voice of the first sign, that they will believe the voice of the latter sign.*

M O S E S had received a token from God of his divine commission^b. Others, and those to increase much as to both power and wisdom, he was afterwards to receive. As now verse 2, of our chapter, to be read with care. The rod or staff, when cast upon the ground, was to become a living serpent, like one of those probably, which the gross idolatrous Egyptians did worship; and upon the touch of Moses to become a rod again. With similar ease would he be able to subdue the cruel pride of that land. Thus did faith overcome fear; and thus was the God of the Hebrews to prevail.

Another token was given to Moses, of his hand becoming instantly leprous; and no less instantly healed. In like manner might the wrath of a potent king, producing terrors, be effectually got the better of. Such evidences together were clear, and satisfactory. Even an obstinate prince, in the end, would be forced to yield.

With much goodness, Moses is still allowed to propose his difficulties; in particular, his want of eloquence^b; an entire stranger to quick and courtly language. Such modesty in the servant of God did not offend; but is mildly answered. Read the scripture narrative^c.

Go, and I will be with thy mouth, &c. Still however, hesitating more than was proper, but a good evidence of scripture authenticity, he asks for an assistant, a license far from justifi-

^a Ezek. xxxiii. 11. Isa. lvii. 15.

^b Ex. iii. 12.

^c Verse 10.

^d Acts vii. 22. Ex. chap. xviii.

able, and is sharply rebuked, but in language suited to the manner of men ; God being without passions such as theirs. Let the young keep this in view. Then directs him to think of Aaron his brother, and who was even then just on his way. What a gladsome meeting of two such near relations, and both to be so honourably employed ?

Their several orders then are distinctly given. The one, in private, was to tell God's mind ; the other to act as his spokesman ^d. Whereon Moses took to him his *Rod*, wherewith, yet only as a visible instrument signs were to be done.

From the whole, we are taught to manage every thing belonging to religion with calm wisdom. There is no Piety, but quite the reverse, in rash belief ^e. Even private impressions are not to be relied upon, for convincing others. Credulity and true faith are widely different. God allows none to appear in his name, without a proper warrant again. Between signs given to an embassy, and the nature of it, there is a suitableness. Such were the judgements by Moses ; and such the beneficent miracles of CHRIST. The one punished sin ; the other removed the penal effect of it. Moreover, Supreme goodness, in devotion, allows to be as it were argued with. A mode of sweet relief, but to be prudently managed : since too much familiarity in this way may become hazardous, and even irreverent. They who pray extempore ought to be guarded, at least in public utterances. Stand in awe, and sin not ; commune with your heart, and be still. This will not be a hindrance to pure lively effusion.

When God, as in the case of Moses, calls to difficult work ; he never fails to strengthen ^f. Brothers, from office, ought mutually to aid ^g. The best of men are the most sensible of infirmities. An excess is pitiable, and should be mildly corrected ^h. They are nobly qualified, who are least forward, either to ask, or to receive high office.

^d Acts vii. 35.

^e 1 Thess. v. 21. 1 John iv. 1.

^f 2 Cor xii 8, &c.

^g Eph. iv. 8, &c.

^h So from verse 14th of our chapter.

IX. God's

IX. GOD'S CHARGE TO MOSES.

Chap. iv. 19. *And the LORD said to Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt : for all the men are dead which sought thy life.*

MOSES being now under divine command must leave the feeding of flocks, for much more important work ; seeking leave to give up his trust from Jethro ; who, by this time, might have been a convert to the belief of one only living and true God ; though not ceremonially initiated, as native Jews were.

He said unto his son-in-law, go in peace ; or be thou every way prosperous. He seems, likewise, to have had a new encouragement from above. So, with Zipporah, and his children, they set out ; with the Rod of God in his hand. Foreseen difficulties do still impress his mind, and are pitied by a new and gracious revelation to him, how God would suffer Pharaoh to harden his own heart ; ascribed, after the Hebrew manner, to God himself, and by no means literally to be understood. Read the passage, under this sense of the word ^a. So in after parts of this history, again and again, Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart.

Still, in consequence of manifold dreadful judgements, he, the king of Egypt, is made to stand, the same as raised up ^b.

Tell Pharaoh without dismay, that Israel is my first born, or chief. So understood of David likewise ^c, importing beloved too. And scruple not to add, upon every new refusal of liberation ; I say unto thee, in the name of the MOST HIGH, let my Chosen go, and so forth. Read out of scripture, the whole certification.

All this while, his son Gershom, had not been circumcised, as other Hebrews ; which he is put in mind of, by an apparent wrathful form ; and forthwith commanded to be done. The prime obstacle, hitherto, had been Zipporah his wife, not as yet, possibly, a thorough convert ; but now submitting. Af-

^a James i. 13, 14.

^b Verse 23.

^c Psal. lxxxix. 23.

ter the affair was over, she did rancorously express herself: terming her husband a bloody one. We are not bound to vindicate such measures of acting. A doting mother, and but half religious, may extenuate what doth not excuse. The gracious LORD next said to Aaron, whom Moses had left in Egypt, Go in the way that leads to the wilderness, and meet thy brother; which he did with affection, and as far as the Mount of God. A true picture the whole of ingenuous nature; and respect for celestial visions. They did now mutually converse upon the grand enterprize; and then travelled, till they came to Egypt. Soon as might be, collecting the whole Elders of the children of Israel; Aaron, as principal spokesman, opened up the charge given by JEHOVAH, to his brother Moses; and gave them signs, which produced conviction, and willingness to obey. Warmed with the love of liberty, they became fond of such an arduous design; thanking God who did so far graciously look upon them.

We may observe from the above, that real divine calls seldom, if ever, interfere with relative duties. Moses sought consent, and took a decent farewell of Jethro, his father-in-law. His main design, however, he did not fully open up; nor was he bound to it, but the contrary. As few difficulties, from other kinsfolk as possible, were to be laid in the way. There might be danger from publication. One good deed is generally recompensed by another. Moses had been faithful, and Jethro is obliging. An increase of obstinacy is much to be feared when conviction is early stifled. Think of ^a the idea before given to the first born ^b. Rites of positive nature are binding, so long as GOD wills. Evidences to truth are delightfully cheering. They greatly ennoble also and fortify the human mind ^c.

X. PHARAOH CHIDETH.

Chap. v. 2. *And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.*

MOSES and Aaron, as ambassadors from heaven, went and told Pharaoh, in a polite, but firm manner, how

^a Psal. i. 1, 2. ^b Matth. i. 21.

^c 1 John v. 4. 1 Thess. v. 21.

the LORD GOD of Israel did require, that his people should have leave to observe a religious feast unto him, in the wilderness. To which he proudly returns, Who is that LORD of yours, that I should so tamely obey him? I know nothing of him; neither will I let them go. And they said mildly to the king, with certain courtiers, it may be around him, The GOD of the Hebrews hath ordained us to profer this petition.

Heathens themselves gave credit to celestial intercourses. Let us go, they pray again, but three day's journey off, and for a commanded religious service. Though so great a multitude, we mean to go unarmed. Nor can we disobey without certain hazard of divine displeasure.

Pharaoh's anger now rises into rage, saying, Let not that obnoxious people so much as think of becoming idle so long; get you and they both to your proper burdens. Too much already has been allowed to the increase of their number and strength. He next ordains the task-masters to refuse them straw for burning their bricks; but that they be obliged to gather it themselves, and yet not diminish ought of their tale. Read at large the tyrannical order. How dismal a state to live under such?

Officiating cruel instruments are rarely wanting, under princes so arbitrary. Pharaoh's commands are hardly sooner made known, than they begin to be executed in all their rigour. Where scorn, pride, and passion meet, they observe no bounds. The Hebrew LORD JEHOVAH is understood, by both king and people of Egypt, as a little local deity of their own. The pitiless taskmasters trusted on Hebrew labour, and their chiefs were cruelly beaten, for not doing what was impossible. As slaves, and overpowered, they are obliged to cry.

Wisely and modestly some of the best Egyptians did remonstrate, but all in vain. The swollen tyrant heart doth but scorn and hate the merciful. Ye are idle, ye are idle; go now and work as I have said.

Having

Having no more hope from Pharaoh, the despairing *Israelites* meet with Moses and Aaron, and speak to them in rage. Read the narrative. They, pretending an order from God, had put a sharp and long sword in the hands of the *Egyptians*, to slay all Israel. This was not true, but highly compassionate, and therefore doth Moses mildly bear with it.

He carries the whole to God, in humble affectionate prayer, and said, expostulating, O LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, and so forth. The freedom is not to be imitated, but as by a like familiar with divine visions and intercourse. Himself is in the dark, and his poor people inconsolable.

Let not inferior humiliating conditions complain, but trust. Moses and Israel are now upon the very eve of release. Hence learn to wait upon him, till his own good time come. It is proper that seasons for different states should be with the FATHER alone. Psal. xxxvii. cannot be too often read: Fret not thyself, and so on.

When once people are convinced by solid arguments, they should abide firm to the purposes of them. Revolving the grounds and reasons for their belief, will not fail to strengthen^b. Even false sentiments of religion should be spoken to with mildness. Thus did Moses and Aaron. Courteousness towards superiors is very becoming^c. Be meek and firm withal.

XI. GOD'S PROMISE RENEWED TO MOSES.

Chap. vi. 6. *Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage: and I will redeem you with a stretched-out arm, and with great judgments.*

THE frequent familiar appearances of God to Moses, and their effects hitherto, left him no room to doubt

^b Heb. xi. throughout. Eph. iv. 15
^c Verse iii. 2 Tim. ii. 24. 1 Peter iii. 8.

of their truth. These, among modern Jews, go by the name of Shechinala, denoting *light*, as best fitted to rouse. The late sore chiding of Pharaoh is followed by a new one, with the grievous murmuring of Israel. Read from the beginning of this chapter, the substance whereof is, that the haughty monarch should be forced to let them go. Assuming upon this occasion the name JEHOVAH, which imports unchangeable, as in being, so in truth and fidelity; the reason assigned by himself: I will redeem them with a stretched-out arm; with many more particulars promised to Abraham.

That renewed engagement, Moses did make known to his brethren, which in their anguish at first, they would not hearken to; and which led him once more, humbly to expostulate in prayer.

In return, he and Aaron are appointed to go unto them with a second clear charge. The heads of their different tribes are then enumerated; to make what was to happen the more conspicuous, along with the words of the MOST HIGH to be read. Among other things, I will make thee as a god unto Pharaoh. Thou and Aaron, thy brother, shall withhold no part of what I have now said, and may afterwards command. As my judgements are executing, he will harden his heart, but be forced to yield in the end.

Then shalt thou, Moses, when the king doth require from thee a miraculous sign, cast thy Rod before him, and it shall become a living serpent: emblematical, at once, of cunning and fierceness. The brother, in this matter, begins to act. Accordingly they did so, to the amazement of the Monarch, and many of his prime officers. He sends for his wise men, accustomed to slight of hand tricks; who are allowed to do the like, or at least what did appear to be so, for herein the learned differ. Most probably we are to admit the literal sense, though not by any virtue of their supposed enchantments. Permissively they are made to see, from what follows, how vain all their further oppositions would be; for they are all swallowed up by that of Aaron.

Still a hardened heart would pay no due regard to the LORD JEHOVAH'S messengers.

The pride of Egypt must be humbled with more severities, somewhat in kind to what they had made others feel. At the banks of the Nile, it is probable, where the king had been in use to bathe himself^d, Moses is directed to go and stand till he should come; and then say unto him, the LORD GOD of the Hebrews hath sent me, to insist as before, that his people may go and worship; and in this thou shalt know that I speak from him, I will smite with the Rod that is in mine hand, and the waters of the river shall be turned into blood; and the fish shall die, and the river from thence shall hideously smell, and the Egyptians be unable to drink. So spake he in the hearing of Aaron, and the Rod had its effect, through all the land, canals and pools of every sort. Magicians, as before, are allowed to do the same. This plague continued for seven days.

Still the king, with his courtiers, might have wine, with other liquid spirits; and, unmindful of others, his heart hardens; which leads to a yet more tremendous judgement of frogs, neither possible to be destroyed; nor kept out even from the king's palace. All household utensils were filled with them. All dreadful to think of. Still, however, the Magicians effect, or were allowed. Neither of the above plagues, notwithstanding, could they either alleviate or remove.

Then Pharaoh, to a certain degree relenting, applies to Moses and Aaron to obtain this mercy from their God; with his promise, that, in such case, Israel should go out. The favour is granted, but the promise is broken. The king is still obstinate; and owing to that, the dust of the earth is next let out against him in lice. This inclines him to penitence; and yet not effectual. Swarms of noxious flies become after this, an instrument of divine vengeance. A most hideous succession^e! All is corruption and torture every where, save in the land of Goshen. Here the king would grant Israel to worship, but not in the wilderness.

^d Chap. vii. 15.

^e Chap. ix, from verse 20th.

Moses, in the name of JEHOVAH, would not accept. With the departure of the pestive swarms, any good inclinations of the prince depart likewise. An example of too frequent hardening in every age. Afterwards comes the grievous murrain upon beasts of all kinds; anon, the boils, and blains, and hail; the plagues of locusts and darkness^a. Pharaoh, in place of amending, becomes next to furious; and except upon his own terms, refuses to be seen by Moses and Aaron any more. A piece of deceit, like others before this.

How next to inconceivably progressive is the power of vice? That of the selfish kind, more than any. How wise when rightly understood, are all the measures of providence with mankind? None regularly called, and acting under clear divine authority, ought to be complained of. Till grace comes along with means, the very best will prove ineffectual. A severe trial to the good; who yet must do their duty. Their reward, in the end, is sure^b. Blessed are those servants,

XII. THE DEATH OF EGYPTIAN FIRST-BORN.

Chap. xi. 4, 5. *And Moses said, Thus saith the LORD, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts.*

BY what we are now to consider, Pharaoh did grant the requisition of Moses and Aaron, though with a virulence expressive of the utmost aversion. Israel is put upon a method of repaying themselves. Yet will I bring one plague more, said JEHOVAH; after which both he and his people will be glad to let you go, as one who thrusts another out.

Let the Hebrews, prior to this, borrow of his and her Egyptian neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. The

^a May be read chap. ix. and x.

^b Think of John iv. 32.

design, as yet, seems not to have been revealed. And the LORD JEHOVAH gave his people favour for the above purpose ; the man Moses besides being now great among them, even to terror.

Then said Moses from the LORD, about midnight I will go out, by an angel, whether literal, or a blast of death, makes no material difference, seeing the phrase is used in both senses ; and all the first-born of Egypt shall die, from the king, to the meanest of his subjects ^a. And there shall be a great cry of grief, such as never was before ; but against Israel shall not so much as a dog move ; nor man, nor beasts shall be affected with the noise. Astonishing ! The more, if all the above was certified to Pharaoh.

Bowing to the GOD of Israel, his people would be suffered to depart. What was said to the king, was said in just heat, even by meek Moses ; and his hardened heart brought to a low ebb. This last judgement was no less novel, than it was full of horror ; whence the scripture narrative becomes minute, and should be read. The month of their release was ever after to begin the Hebrew year ; to wit, Abib ^b, signifying an ear of corn, because then, probably, in what we term the shot blade, much earlier than with us. The congregations of Israel are spoken to, that they might be in readiness. The feast, from what was to happen, was termed Passover ; and a lamb, or kid to be killed, for each family, upon the fourteenth day, commemorative of sprinkled blood ; with unleavened bread, and a sauce of bitter herbs. All in a standing posture. The whole expressive of haste from oppression ; their loins girt, shoes on, and a staff. Repeated at large, chapter xii.

How irresistibly impressive of divine Supremacy ^c. So the children of Israel bowed their heads, and worshipped GOD. They went and did as he had commanded. At midnight, the hideous death-cry went up. Hereupon Pharaoh, with his highest official servants did call for Moses, and Aaron, to rise and get up, they and their children, also take your flocks, and

a See Chap. xii. 29.

b Chap. xiii. 4.

c verse 14, 16, 27.

begone ; leaving them a blessing from their God, to preserve health and future success.

The Egyptian urgency is set forth, by the scripture, in strong terms ; fearing lest they should be all dead men. Thus though not without a divine warrant, they did, in some sort, spoil Egypt ; but, at the same time, scruply enough obtain just wages. Even those they borrowed from, and in good faith, did not allow time to repay. The abuse of such an example would be equally criminal, with an impious infidel cavil.

It is the manner of God's justice to warn before it cuts off^b. A sure symptom of hardening is to delay amendment, because wrath is not executed to the uttermost^c. Let parents be advised^d.

XIII. THE JEWISH PASSOVER.

Chap. xii. 42. *It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD, forbringing them out from the land of Egypt : this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.*

WE have seen before this, how the Jewish Passover was instituted ; to be a memorial of what was to follow, during the Moſaic dispensation^e. A night of manifold observations, says the margin ; a deliverance, after four hundred and thirty years captivity. Christians ought to be familiarly acquainted with particulars^f.

On the tenth day of Nisan, or Abib, which answers nearest to our March, they were to choose the victim, a lamb, or kid ; a male of eight days old at least, and without blemish. Beauty and sweetness of taste may account for this ; and teach, that the best of our days, and goods occasionally, are due to divine service^g. How undutiful, and ungrateful, to reserve the dregs of life alone for God^h ? Think of the LAMB of God, as set forthⁱ.

b Chap. xi. 8.

c Prov. i. 24, &c.

d Prov. xxii. 6. Ex. xii. 26.

e Verse 1 t. 43.

f 1 Cor. v. 6.

g Mal. i. 7, 8.

h Prov. iii. 26, 27.

i 2 Cor. v. 21. Eph. v. 2.

The paschal offering was to be killed in the even ^a; or between the two Jewish ones. Margin, one of them between mid-day and sun-set, as allowed by the chief of all our modern Jews. And then was CHRIST led forth to suffer. How exact and minute a parallel ^b; in its literal translation, about even, about the going down of the sun.

All who were Jews by natural descent, and proselyted, were to eat, as Christians grown up ought, the sacred memorials of their gracious LORD's death. Here there is, or should be no distinction between real believers ^c. Such union is a chief glory of our divine institute ^d.

Only males were positively ordained to go up from all parts of Judea, for keeping the Passover, on obvious accounts, which do not hold with that of the Christian; which may be celebrated every where, and at all times. A sweetly joyous communion!

Unleavened bread was to be made use of by the Jews, to denote haste. Women, when in their power, might join ^e. Where a lamb, or kid was too much for one family, others might be called in. Remains of what could be eaten were not to be carried out, nor a bone broken ^f. Behold a clear design of unity in all divine dispensations. Even Jewish rites were as shadows of good things to come ^g. The whole of them now happily superseded ^h.

Other paschal signs of Jewish haste are easily understood, as standing, the staff, bitter herbs, &c. How blessed a state is that of the Christian, compared even with theirs ⁱ?

XIV. THE ISRAELITES GO OUT OF EGYPT.

Chap. xiii. 20. *And they took their journey from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness.*

AT the urgent desire of Pharaoh, and his officers ^k, the Israelites depart from Egypt; they took with them,

^a Chap. xii. 6. ^b Deut. xvi. 6. ^c John xiv. 28, &c. ^d 1 Cor. x. 16, &c.
^e 1 John i. 17. ^f 1 Cor. v. 7. ^g Levit. ii. 41. ^h See this applied
 John xix. 33, 36. ⁱ Heb. x. 1. ^j Eph. ii. 10, &c. ^k Heb. viii. 11, &c.
^l Luke iv. 16, &c. ^m Psal. lxxxix. 15, &c. ⁿ Gal. iv. 1, &c. ^o Chap. xii. 3.
 not

not only their herds and flocks, but even their dough before it was leavened ; likewise the jewels and raiment which they had borrowed ; and if left, themselves might have repaid.

The direct road to the wilderness and Canaan, would have been through the land of the Philistines ; a fierce people, whom they chose, at this time, wisely to avoid, under divine direction. Miracles of safety are never unnecessarily interposed. Their way eastward led to the Red-sea, five in a row, agreeable to the margin of verse 18th ; the passages being rough and narrow ^a. Even ancestor hair, and other preservable parts, have been accounted as dear. Superstition apart, people may do as they will. Our chief Christian consolation arises from John xvii. 24. Phil. iii. 21.

Succoth did terminate the first day's journey : next, their encampment is more firm and orderly at Etham, in the edge of the wilderness, and nigh to the Red Sea ^b. All along the LORD JEHOVAH went before them, by an amazing majestic appearance, a pillar of cloud in the day, quite different from every other, and clearly symbolical of divine inspection. See a most beautiful allusion, Isa. lii. 12. At times it appears to have been taken up, and to have rested, whither the Israelites were to come ^c. To affect describing what was so miraculous would be vain. For certain, it was high, broad, and spreading at the bottom over the whole host ^d. The clear side, like fire, was still towards Israel in the night ^e.

The Omniscient God warns Moses of what would happen from Pharaoh, but that he would be caught in his own snare. With this view Israel was to encamp at Pi-hahiroth, or the Chaps of Hiroth, between two lofty mountains, a narrow passage and rugged ; still proceeding eastward, till they came over against Baal-Zephon, an idolatrous town, it is likely from the name ^f, the lord of the north. Here they were to fix as nigh to the sea as might be, till further orders, for reasons assigned in the history, and to be read. Thus shut up, they seemed to Pharaoh as a sure prey ; but God was to be honoured up-

^a Compare Gen. l. 25. with verse 19th of our chapter.

^b Chap. xv. 22.

^c Num. x. 11, 12.

^d Num. xiv. 14.

^e Psal. cv. 39. 1 Cor. x. 1.

^f 1 Chr. iv. 33.

on his ruin, and that of his numerous host, as sole sovereign LORD.

Now Pharaoh's revenge, and that of his prime courtiers, was kindled into madness, complaining one to another of what a foolish thing they had done, in suffering such a body of useful slaves to depart. Then the king, as leader on, did prepare for a pursuit, with two hundred chosen chariots, and what else he stood in need of. His force was tremendous; and their march begun, as is thought, on the nineteenth day after Israel had left them: resolving, in the face of all good faith, either to destroy, or to bring them back.

From what has been gone through, it appears, how capital a virtue prudence is. The young and weak are not all at once to be entered upon hard service ^a. Chief commanders in the military line require great skill, no less than courage. Timidity is an effect of servitude. When GOD is upon the side of either nations or individuals, they have nothing to fear; and he is ever with the good.

XV. PHARAOH PURSUETH.

Chap. xiv. 3. *For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.*

THE People of Israel hemmed in, as we have already seen, were in Pharaoh's estimation his most certain property again. His heart still hardens, after all that both he and his people had suffered. GOD so permitting, and in the Hebrew idiom said to do ^b. Thus hitherto did he make Pharaoh stand or outlive former judgement; the true sense of the raised up, in that last passage.

As the Monarch of Egypt drew nigh with all his mighty host; Israel, in terror, cried to the LORD, which was right; but their expostulation with Moses was cruel, and impious. One devoutly generous alone could bear with it. Read the

^a Verse 17.

^b Compare Rom. ix. 21, 22.

scripture narrative. Moses maintains his firm heroic belief. Fear ye not thus, stand still, and so forth. Salvation is nigh; an OMNIPOTENT JEHOVAH is just about to fight for you.

Speak, said he to the children of Israel, that they cease cowardly crying, and go forward: Lift up thy rod over the sea, and divide. Astonishing, and as yet without a precedent. Moses did so, and they went over as upon dry ground. The hardened Egyptians follow, and the sea closes upon them. A miracle not to be hid, and doing honour to the *One only living and true GOD*, through all ages.

The pillar, whence GOD by the angel of his presence spake unto Moses, came between the two armies, and not in the van as formerly; a cloud of darkness to the one, and of clear shining fire to the other. A strong wind too was made use of as an instrument. In fact, the waters stood up ^a. An instance among thousands of the true scripture sublime. Read attentively ^b.

The Egyptians towards morning, saw their error, but too late. Waters, and even their own carriages, we pretend not to say how, were against them. They would have fled back, but could not. The waters came again, and all were drowned. Thus did JEHOVAH fight for Israel ^c. Revenge, when harboured, becomes truly hardening. Fright like Israel's, upon the back of late courage, is disgraceful. Blame not in haste the brave and experienced. A meek sedate temper is its own reward ^d. The devoutly attentive see GOD in every thing. Tracts of this history are to be met with in various heathen authors.

XIII. THE SONG OF MOSES.

Chap. xv. 1, &c. *Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.*

THIS song is allowed to be a masterpiece of bold figurative composition, and yet not difficult to be under-

^a Psal. lxxvii. 16, 19. ^b Compare Psal. lxxviii. 12, 13. ^c Apply here Psal. vii. 14, 15. — xxxiii. 10, &c. — lxxxix. 15, &c. ^d Matth. v. 5. 1 Pet. iii. 3. Psal. xxv. 9.

stood

stood by the attentive, in so far as concerns good practice. It would appear that the men and women did sing, or play alternately, see verse 20. Possibly too, they moved gracefully, as each were affected by the different parts. Both music and dancing then were consecrated to religious purposes. Nor is there any thing, where families are inclined, to hinder the like still. All who sing in tune do this in effect.

A devout enthusiasm must have been felt, where each individual were so nearly concerned. I will sing to the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously. Indeed the doing was quite his own. The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea ^a. Now had the ALMIGHTY an honour new and widely extended ^b. Divine judgments against *Egypt* could not be concealed. An admiring world would speak of them, and record. In fact, divers heathen historians have done so, nor will such knowledge decrease, but the contrary, to the end of time. This and the triumph of the Lamb will go together.

How glorious to foresee, and how much more glorious to enjoy. The LORD is my strength, and my song, verse 2, and is become my salvation. Truly grand, in a temporal sense; but still more so, in that which is spiritual and everlasting ^c. He is my GOD in special covenant relation, and I will prepare him an habitation, more suitable than that of the cloud itself: that of a devout heart, replete with esteem, love and joy, even to rapture ^d.

The LORD, verse 3, is a man of war; the LORD JEHOVAH is his name, even he who changeth not ^e. Steadfast valour and success are ever with him ^f. A poetical condescension truly! Much more affecting than mere grammar niceties.

Pharaoh's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea ^g. As a nuisance not to be looked upon. Read what follows, and needs no explication. Thy right hand, O LORD, put for power, hath dashed them in pieces. Shreds, to indicate victory, are now only to be seen.

a Compare Chap. xiv. 25.

leisure Luke i. from verse 71.

---vi. 3, 4.

b See Rev. xv. 3.

d See 2 Tim. i. 5.

f 1 Sam. xvi. 18.

c Compare with good

e See Chap. iii. 14--

g Verse 4.

From this to the end, each must act the interpreter for himself, only making allowance for swelling eastern poetry. The enemy said, in the pride of his confidence; I will pursue, &c. Yet thou didst blow with thy wind, and they sank quick as lead in the mighty waters.

Who is like unto thee, O LORD, &c. ? Miracles of love and justice are with thee alone ! How hast thou guided us to thy holy habitation. The people upon every hand, shall hear and be afraid. Fierce *Palestine* in like manner shall soon submit, and trembling take hold on idolatrous *Canaan*. Egypt, as a price, has paid for all this. Their further hope is largely insisted upon, and should be read. Indeed the whole with attention again and again.

Such a pious, fervent, poetical view of deliverance, ought never to have been forgot. Yet gratitude is not always lasting, nor songs of that sort so often explained to the young as is proper. Those relating to the gospel, would have wonderful effects ; whereof all the former is but as a shadow.

PART FOURTH.

TILL THE DEATH OF MOSES.

I. MURMURING AT MORAH.

Chap. xv. 24. *And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink ?*

IT is melancholy to reflect, how soon, even after large experience of DIVINE goodness, some do forget. Hear how mildly and yet piercingly CHRIST expostulates ^a,

^a Luke xvii. 17.

Were there not ten cleansed, where are the nine? So soon too, did the children of Israel begin to murmur, even after Pharaoh's overthrow^a. In three days after, coming to Morah, where the waters were bitter, brackish or mineral, they say in anger to Moses, What shall we drink? You have brought us to a strange allowance indeed. In effect, a complaint against God. Perhaps themselves gave the name Morah, by way of contempt.

Moses betakes himself to the LORD in earnest prayer, who, in great goodness, shewed him how to rectify the water, by way of new miracle. They were to be sweetened by the use of a simple mean. Read the text, and compare with it^b. Use the means, but rest not in them. So the Shunamite woman^c. Trust, prayer, and gratitude go well together.

Here the ALMIGHTY is at pains to teach his people, by a memorial ordinance. Let us mark, and improve by the Divine methods of condescension. Memorable occasions should not be forgotten. They aid obedience, which requires great attention, as appears from the variety of phrases made use of, in our passage. The Sovereign LORD, is also God, or gracious to all who are upright, or sincere. He may correct, but will not cast them off^d.

From Morah, the Israelites proceed to Elim, where were twelve wells, with a number of sheltering palm-trees, under which they did encamp^e. Here was large and rich pasturage for rams and ewes; whence the name Elim was given. Each tribe had now one well.

We should expect, and provide for what may be bitter. Say not, my mountain standeth strong, and I shall not be moved. Benefactors, on no account should be afterwards slighted. The high privilege of suffering goodness is to pray^f.

a verse 2, &c. 11, &c.

b Eccles. xxxviii. 5.

c 2 Kings iv. 18, &c.

d See Jer. vii. 12, 23.

Heb. xii. 9, &c. James i. 17.

e Eccles. viii. 14.

f Jam. v. 13. Psal. l.

II. ISRAEL MURMUR AT SIN.

Chap. xvi. 2. *And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.*

AFTER a comfortable rest at Elim, Moses and his people enter upon the wilderness of Sin; where was Mount Sinai. Here they demand not necessary bread, but delicacies, and in a shocking impious tumultuous manner. The flesh-pots of Egypt make them forget their bondage there, and how miraculously they had been delivered.

Upon Moses' devout intercession, their demand is yielded to, but with a foreseen baseness of mind to follow from it. Read the text itself. On the sixth day of the week, they were to prepare of bread rained down from heaven double, to serve them the ensuing Sabbath. To accustom them to fatigue and labour, their course at the same time was lengthened out, though as yet, not revealed to the congregation. Servitude, and want of regular devout exercises had much debased them ^a.

For their temporary indulgence, an amazing miracle is long continued. Behold, I will rain bread, and so on. Upon their part, nothing was needed, but to gather. Moses and Aaron now advertise them of what was to happen ^b. It was indeed, to the glory of Divine power, and forgiving love.

Next Moses admonishes his brother Aaron ^c, to come near to the people, and speak with them, when the glory of the LORD, once more appeared to Israel; which, on account of their sins, had, for a time withdrawn; whence he thus spake to Moses, I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, and so forth. Read the text.

Accordingly what the LORD had said ^d came to pass ^e. Whether quails or pheasants, they were a plump bird, and delicate for food ^f. From nearness to the sea, in that passage, they might be a kind of curfew; and for number, and scat-

^a Verse 1, 2.

^b Verse 6, 7.

^c Verse 8.

^d Verse 13.

^e Compare now Verse 6, 7.

^f See Numbers xi 31.

terment, certainly miraculous. Behold at the same time, after the dew went up, there was a delicate bread left on the ground. Read the description in the text ^a.

How capricious is the sensual appetite ! They soon weary, as will be seen. Read once more from verse 16th. This is the thing which the LORD commanded, and so on. The measure, or proportion, we may be sure, was quite sufficient. In training up for hard service, time and gradual methods ought to be taken. Miracles are not interposed, save in necessary cases, else they would cease to be such. In national murmuring, the good are seldom hearkened unto ^b. Meek wisdom in rulers is then peculiarly requisite, with special reliance upon God. Concern for bodily subsistence should ever be subordinate to that which is spiritual ; prepare for Sabbath duties ^c.

III. REGARD FOR THE SABBATH.

Chap. xvi. 23. *And he said unto them, This is that which the LORD hath said, To-morrow is the rest of the holy Sabbath unto the LORD : bake that which ye will bake to-day, and seethe that ye will seethe ; and that which remaineth over lay up for you, to be kept until the morning.*

THE children of Israel were, in comparison of such as are well educated among us, much inferior with regard to knowledge ; and did therefore stand in need of a more rigid method of instruction, which, in part, will account for what follows ^d. This is the thing that the LORD commanded, relative to their gathering of quails and manna, &c. Read the scripture text. A certain quantity was to be allowed, and nothing lost ; fit to be imitated in all ages.

They gathered accordingly, and measured, either at home or in some appointed place of rendezvous for each tribe.

^a Psal. lxxviii. 24, 25. — ^{ev.} 40, John 6, 13.

^b Psal. xii. ult.

^c John vi. 27.

^d Verse 16.

Hence,

Hence, there could be no ground for dispute. Moses next cautions them against solicitude, and lays down a rule for them, with certification, if not followed. See the text. To all which the greater part were devoutly obedient.

After all the families had gathered their supposed quantity, the rest melted with the rising sun. On the sixth day, as may be seen, verse 22d, that is our Friday, they collected, by divine order, as much bread as on any other, for the ensuing Sabbath. See the word itself at large from our text.

Such a strict cessation from labour, it is likely, was not required before this, but what was sufficiently compatible with both public and private religious duties : the Sabbath being made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. A thought of great seriousness this to the upright good.

There were some indeed so weak, and wantonly stubborn as not to obey, as there are still, under a much more pure spiritual dispensation. Both justly punishable, as foes at once to virtue and their country. Whence that solemn remonstrance of the MOST HIGH, verse 28, &c. How long, and so forth.

Those, thank God, had a temporary effect, so they rested on the Sabbath-day. Through all ages, and perhaps nations, there have been **such** commemorative ones, which discovers a foundation for them in nature. Even those by men have respect due to them, much more that of our blessed LORD's day, now in place of the Jewish Sabbath, and of far superior moment ^c.

IV. ISRAEL MURMUR AT REPHIDIM.

Chap. xvii. 2. *Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?*

IT has been objected by an acute infidel to the doctrine of miracles, as an argument for divine revelation, that they

^c See Rom. x. 9, 10.

want experience to support them ; to which one answer may be, that when such experience did take place, among the Jews, the careless and uncandid came to consider them as matters of course. Hence their frequent murmurings from distrust of the ALMIGHTY. Thus did they, even at the Red Sea, and at Morah and Sin.

In fact, they complain of Moses, as a murderer, and, through him, blaspheme his and their God. The great good man's resource was ever to him who heareth prayer. What so like the raging of the sea, as the tumults of the people ? Omnipotence alone can repress either of them.

So, under a new aggravated rebellion, the LORD said unto Moses, go on before the people ; and what follows, to be read. Behold, I will stand before thee, to preserve thee, and honour as before, thy divine mission. Smite the solid rock, an emblem of their obstinacy, and there shall come water, in great abundance out. Marvellously good God ! Even sad progressive vice does not stay his forbearance ^a !

Thus did Moses, and called the name of the place, Massah ; signifying temptation, and Meribah, chiding, or strife. A help to future ages, for both prayer and praise.

Remark here, the uniformity of scripture in its narratives and pious commemorations ^b. By the accounts of very credible travellers thither, visible marks still are to be seen of this astonishing miracle. Here history and devotion long after do perfectly unite. See too, how the Old and New Testament do harmonize ^c ; Emblematical of CHRIST.

In the way of clear commanded duty, let not any one fear. Go on, for I am with thee ; is then in effect, the language of heaven ^d. Proper witnesses to every arduous undertaking is agreeable means, though apparently insignificant, as a Rod must be made use of. Blessed is the man ^e, whose strength thou art. For increasing needful faith, the love of God will never be wanting. He stands before his people still, by exceeding great, and precious promises ^f.

Let it be remembered, that Horeb is part of Mount Sinai,

^a Psal. xxxvii 7.—^b 23. ^b Psal. lxxviii. 14, 15.—^c cv. 40. ^c 1 Cor. x. 1, &c.

^d 1 Cor. x. 13.

^e Psal. lxxxiv.

^f 2 Peter i. 4. Heb. iv. 12.—chap. xi. throughout. 1 John v. 4.

whence the law was to be given. So astonishing a preparation for belief and obedience was most suitable ^a. Chiding and strife, both in opposition to truth, may be overcome. The fame of steadfast believers, under great trial, spreads like the waters of Massah and Meribah ^b.

V. AMALEK OVERCOME.

Chap. xvii. 11. *And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.*

THE king here spoken of had got no provocation, nor was there any the least evil design against him. He seems to have had his name from Esau's eldest son ^c, and to have been of a roving warlike disposition. He might have had a secret, causeless grudge at the posterity of Jacob, and was the undoubted aggressor; therefore did soon smart for it.

Moses, by divine appointment, said unto Joshua, young and hopeful, from valour and piety, Choose us out men, and so on. Read the scripture narrative. I will stand upon the top of the hill, to be seen of our host, with the Rod of God in mine hand; while this ensign is displayed, fear not. The attack was meant to be sudden, and was successful. The history is plain, and marvellous ^d.

Joshua, of great fame after this, is entering upon a high scene of action, and is early let in to the means of divine operation. See how he fought ^e. He manifests, even then, cool, religious courage, which never left him. Hur accompanied Moses and Aaron to the Mount, who therefore, must have been a man of eminence. Josephus will have him to have been Miriam's husband.

Prayer did accompany the Ensignia of Israel, and did prevail. Thus doing honour to the glorious ALMIGHTY. True

^a Compare Heb. xii. 20, &c.

^b Matth. v. 5, 10, &c. 1 Cor. iii. 8.

^c Gen. xxxvi. 12.

^d See Deut. xxv. 18.

^e Verse 10, &c.

to their engagements, and trusting to an Omnipotent arm, they would ever after, as then, be successful. An important military as well as civil lesson ^f. Religion and honour pre-
sage victory.

Youth, assisting sincerity, is likewise greatly encouraging. And Joshua discomfited Amalek, verse 13th, and all his confederates, which the LORD commanded Moses to write in a Book, foretelling at the same time what was to happen.

Amalek had taken a cruel advantage ^g, which was not to be forgotten. Remark now the piety of Moses, in erecting an altar, to be named Jehovah-nissi, the LORD is my banner : a transmission of public thanksgiving ^h. Be pious and brave. Read the prediction agreeable to the margin.

National prosperity depends upon rational obedience, the parent of sound military courage ⁱ.

VI. JETHRO'S COUNSEL TO MOSES.

Chap. xviii. 17. *And Moses' father-in-law said unto him, The thing that thou doest is not good.*

WHEN Jethro, the priest of Midian, or prince say some, not unlikely both in one, did hear what God had done for Moses and his people : he took Zipporah, and her two sons, Gershom and Eliazer, all back to his son-in-law ; now not far from Mount Sinai, and after suitable expressions of tenderesses mutual, Moses rehearses the great thing done for them, by the one LORD JEHOVAH ; which ought to be read at large.

And Jethro rejoiced and gave thanks to the MOST HIGH, acknowledging him now more than ever. Nor could the circulation of such truth be otherwise than widely extended, as a prime purpose of the whole. Mark well his pious gratitude from the sacred text. The sight of such a multitude move him to suggest an wholesome counsel, which, in the end was

^f See Lam. iii. 4. ^g Psal. xxv. 1, 2.---xx. 5. ^h Deut. xxv. 18.

ⁱ Joshua i. 5.

ⁱ Prov. xxix. 1.

complied with. Read from verse 17th and doubt not that God was sought unto.

Religious and able men, as assistants were to be chosen ; qualities essential for judging in every age. All dubious cases were to be referred to Moses. Jethro's arguments were quite persuasive, and suitable rulers appointed ; after which Jethro returned to Midian.

Divine judgements are often heard of at a considerable distance, and may be well improven ^a. Wives who have taken an unreasonable dislike, should hearken as soon as may be to conciliating measures. Indeed such differences, more than any, ought to be dreaded, as unnatural and cruelly pestive ^b. It requires no less than religious courage, in judges, to speak and act truly ^c.

VII. GOD'S MESSAGE TO ISRAEL.

Chap. xix. 5. *Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people : for all the earth is mine.*

WHEN people have in view solemnly to devote themselves to God, their minds should be put into a state of due preparation for it, by a clear foresight of their several duties. So said the LORD to Moses, verse 3d and 4th, Tell the children of Israel, and so on. The benefits done them should also be recollected with due care. Read the passage.

What is there engaged for is still very animating, to act as holy and acceptable priests for the MOST HIGH. It was now the Moral Law was to be published, full fifty days after their deliverance from their Egyptian bondage. Ye have seen what I then did, and how much, of course, you are bound to my service. A covenant engagement to this purpose will be most suitable. Fidelity will ensure a continuance and increase of national advantages.

^a Eccles. xv. 14.

^b Compare 1 Peter iii. 7. Deut. i. 13, &c.

^c Jude 24, 25.

To apply each of the above as Christians, will be yet more affecting than even in the case of Israel. Our obligations are far superior to theirs. Deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, to the hope of eternal life. What can equal these ^d? Dreadful, unspeakably dreadful is the servitude of an unconverted person! Let others thank GOD, through JESUS CHRIST. They are able to bear up under every secular evil ^e.

An upright obedience will lead to all the above, than which nothing can be more equal, more pleasant, more profitable, after some experience ^f. A day of such virtue is preferable to an immortality of vice. Engage with love, and this will constrain to the end ^g. GOD is willing to enter into covenant, as one of ourselves ^h. Let us be yet more deliberate than Israel was.

How interesting is it to be unto GOD as a peculiar treasure! A kind of sacred inheritance! To be cared for, and maintained by him. All applicable to the soul and eternity ⁱ. What an honour! What a happiness! A kingdom of priests too! Every where, and at all times acceptable to him ^k. No specialities of favour can go beyond these. An holy nation in heart and in life. A character and state truly divine; next to those of angels ^l.

VIII. PREPARATION FOR THE LAW.

Chap. xix. 11. *And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai.*

THOUGH Israel was destined to be as an heir of the human race, yet for the present he was as a child ^m, differing little from the servant. Hence, but the elements of law were given unto them, and these too, in a form of ter-

d See Rom. vii. 10, &c. e 1 John v. 4, 5. 1 Cor. ii. 9. Phil. iii. 21.

f Prov. iv. 18. g 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. h Verse 8. i John x. 27, &c.

k John iv. 23, 24. 1 Peter ii. 2, &c. l Psal. ciii. 20. civ. 4. Heb. i. 14.

m Gal. iv. 1, &c.

ror. This should ever be taken along with us in perusing their whole history ^a.

Then God was to manifest himself in a tremendous manner on Mount Sinai, where the people were to place themselves at some distance, by way of veneration. Their orders are made very clear, and intimate an awful regard ^b. The whole should be read. They were cleansed ceremonially, with much proper instruction no doubt.

The third day was quite a tremendous one, when Israel and their God did solemnly meet. Read the scripture narrative. Magnificence till then never known ^c. Hence, the LORD called Moses to give him a new charge for the people. Aaron was allowed to accompany him. An abridged copy of the Moral Law in ten commandments is delivered.

Angels, we are assured, were likewise present ^d. How amazing the difference between publishing the first and second covenant ^e? The last, sweet in its nature, as in outward form ^f. Worthily celebrated by divine benevolence ^g.

IX. ACTS OF JUSTICE.

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE BELONGS TO LEVITICUS.

Chap. xix. 31. *Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your GOD.*

CERTAIN acts of justice are in special danger of being overlooked, and, on that account to be the more taken notice of. In all ages, there have been impostors pretending to foresight and knowledge of secreted things. A great impiety. The scripture speaks of these in the style of custom, and not as authenticating such. Familiar spirits are said to derive that name from a word in the Hebrew, signifying bottle or hollow vessel ^b. They spoke at times, as from their belly, deceiving the people.

^a See verse 10th of our chapter.

^b Verse. 17.

^c Deut. iv. 11.

^d Acts vii. 38. Gal. iii. 19.

^e John i. 17.

^f Heb. xii. 18, &c.

Heb. ii. 1, 2, 3, 8, 9. Phil. ii. 9. Gal. iv. 4, 5. Rom. viii. 15.

^g Matth. xi. 25, &c. compare 2 Cor. iii. at large.

^h Job xxxii. 19.

Wizard, they understood as a being of another world. All cheat together, yet carried on, sometimes for money, sometimes diversion. To consult such, from belief, is most iniquitous.

Futurities and concealments are solely objects of *DIVINE OMNISCIENCE*. Superstitious folly and impatience ought to be abhorred ^d. Poor deranged creatures are often made use of by the artful. Justice and godliness require them to be punished. They rarely fail to encourage obscene measures.

Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, is at once polite and beneficial ^e. It seems to say, what in common is true, that with the aged is wisdom, and teaches the young virtuously to aspire. In most civilized countries, elders bear rule. Lengthened out lives, and useful, have a claim to high praise.

It is cruel to vex strangers ^f, even though aforetime, they may have erred ^g. If brethren by religion, still more regard is due unto them. It is grievous in itself to leave the land of our fathers; add not more sorrow to this, by the smallest mark of indifference. When help is brought to what may be easiest hurt, the favour is enhanced. Mutual compassion is specially due from like sufferers.

Do no unrighteousness in judgment ^h. Buying and selling require the strictest justice, for society's sake. Likewise regular performance of all engagements. Defraud not the young and poor in particular ⁱ. Grounds for obedience often repeated, argue great earnestness.

X. THE LAW OF TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Chap. xx. 1, 2. *And GOD spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy GOD, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

THIS preface to the ten commandments imports a Divine right to ordain; the obligation of mutual cove-

d Psal. xxxvii. 6. Exod. xx. 6, 25. Deut. xviii. 10. Isa. viii. 19. Acts xvi. 18.
e Verse 32. f Verse xxiii. 34. g Chap. xvii. 8, 12. h Verse 35.

i 1 Chron. xxiii. 29.

nanting

nanting, high favours received, and no less signal future hopes. Duty, truth, and gratitude, are all concerned. From verse 3, the law begins.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me; and to be religiously worshipped. Though numerous amongst others, they were all vain, false, or fictitious. Judges. styled gods sometimes, had a claim only to civil respect ^a. Neither before, nor besides him, was there one supreme. A plurality is next to none at all. To divide religious worship is to ruin the whole. Where there is no equal, there can be no competitor ^b.

The manner of Divine worship is next prescribed ^c. Thou shalt not make, &c. Most absurd, as well as impious, to make a statue or picture of him who is boundless or infinite: More impious still to worship such image. With idolaters there ought to be no connivance. To yield in one point makes way for worse. I am jealous of what belongs to my peculiar honour, and will admit of no rivalry, but visit such with strokes of awful justice. Upon children temporally, as of those who did hate me in practice ^d. Hence the seventy years Babylonish captivity. Mercy here rejoiceth over judgement, in conspicuous manner ^e.

The third command guards against false and profane swearing. To take, signifies to lift up or to swear. Name comprehends all DIVINE attributes, titles, and even works, manifesting these. Vain, denotes falsehood, or perjury, and may comprehend inferior oaths, both direct and minced ^f. A grand act of devotion ^g. What escapes human observation, does not that which is Divine. Guiltless imports a sure and dreadful search ^h. Beware of fraud, violence, sensualisin. There can be no fear of God, when people are given to swear. The veracity of such is to be suspected ⁱ.

The last command of the first table is to remember the Sabbath-day, &c. ^k. Make a sensible strict difference between that and former days. Holiness denotes separation. Sabbath signifies bodily rest, and for benefit to the mind. A solemn

^a Psal. lxxxii. 1. ^b 2 Thess. xvii. 33. ^c Verse 4, 5, 6. ^d Lev. xxvi. 39.

^e See Lev. xxxix. from verse 40. ^f Compare Matth. v. from verse 34.

Heb. vi. 16. ^g Jer. iv. 2. ^h Mal. iii. 6. ⁱ Jam. v. 12.

^k from verse 9, to 12.

opportunity for commemorating the creation, and delivery of the Jews from Egypt ^k. Servants and beasts have a claim to rest; stranger proselytes also ^l. The first table observed warrants all that follows. Among Christians, obedience ought to rise with superlative divine discoveries.

XI. SECOND TABLE OF THE LAW.

Chap. xx. 12. *Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy GOD giveth thee.*

TO honour parents is to respect them ^a: to obey, cherish, and maintain. All, at times, expressed by the word piety, as next in relation to GOD. Death, among the Jews, was punishment for great transgressors. Still the obedient have a better prospect than long life upon earth. Health and mutual enjoyment are inestimable felicities.

Verse 13, forbids deliberate murder; and neither killing in self-defence, nor on account of enormous crimes ^b.

The seventh commandment ^c forbids adultery, next to murder injurious, as subversive of trust, fair succession, and regard to solemn oath ^d. Heathens have preferred marriage purity to life. A natural and useful provision is made for both sexes. Under adultery, all inferior sensual crimes are prohibited. All commandments negatively expressed are thus to be understood.

Thou shalt not steal ^e, either fraudulently, or by violence ^f; interprets clearly.

To bear false witness ^g is horrible injustice and impious, when on oath. Some consequences from this are irremediable. Molestation of character is dreadful cruelty ^h.

Not to covet ⁱ secures whatever is socially equitable. Some who want power want not evil wishes and designs; in the

^k See Chap. xxxi. 16, 17. ^l Compare Deut. v. 15.
^a Lev. xix. 3. ^b See Gen. ix. 5, 6. Exod. xxii. 2. ^c ver 14. ^d Mal. iii. 6. ^e Ver. 15.
^f Matth. vii. 12. ^g Verse 16. ^h Eph. iv. 25. ⁱ Psal. 15. throughout.
ⁱ Verse xvii.

eye of OMNISCIENCE real and even great sins^a. Consider well, Matth. vi. 9. Requiring in effect love to all^b. The more necessary that goods are, they become so much the more sacred.

How happy would people be, by an universal obedience to the laws of both tables. So short a summary may be remembered with ease. The manner of their delivery was well adapted to an infant state of the human mind. God then spoke by Moses, as mediator. Public worship is the preservative of national obedience. Build for me an altar, and sacrifice thereon.

IX. CRIMES BELOW CAPITAL.

Chap. xx. 20. *And Moses said unto the people, Fear not : for GOD is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.*

SOME sins are much more heinous in the sight of God than others : So doth our text, and what follows, clearly import. Undesigned killing is homicide, and not murder. Rashness and severity notwithstanding are criminal, and merit some just testimony against them : Slaves, even though heathens, are still men^c.

A judicial process in every such case is proper. Compassion is due to the undesigning man-slayer. If men strive, and hurt an intervening woman with child, they are not answerable for the consequences^d. To be tried however legally. Much must be left in the breasts of magistracy : To slay too, at once, and with deliberation, is horrible. The rigour of retaliating law might be dispensed with, by the sufferer's consent, and not otherwise : A milder spirit suits the blessed gospel^e. How worthy then, of our best regards ? The reign of JESUS, is that of sweet forgiving love.

Freedom from slavery receives a degree of right, from extreme bad usage^f : The law, no doubt, did permit agree-

^a James i. 14, 15. Prov. iv. 23.
^d verse 22.

^b 1 Tim. ii. 8.
^e Matth. v. 38, &c.

^c Verse 21.
^f Verse 26.

ment among parties. The manumission of slaves was legally to be certified.

By all possible means, what is cruel should be prevented ^a; as death occasioned by furious animals: If known as such to the owner, he was to suffer in proportion. Hence the heinous nature of deliberate murder became well known, and high value of human life with God. Much nice evidence after all was requisite ^b. Criminals themselves were to have their punishments mitigated. Read what follows of our chapter ^c: We have an excellent regulation, and much less attended to than should be, as to the covering up of pits, which is plain throughout; so in the case of one man's ox hurting another. Similar cases these do easily help to regulate: How obvious is DIVINE regard to justice and mercy!

X. LAWS FOR MEN AND WOMEN SERVANTS.

Chap. xxi. 1. *Now these are the judgments which thou shalt set before them.*

JUDGMENTS, laws, and statutes, are nearly words of the same import. Moses was to communicate to the children of Israel, what they could not so well bear at the Mount ^d. Servants are of singular use in society, and not to be overlooked.

If from purchase, the time of their service was to be limited to six years ^e. A humiliating view of most ancient states, and not of easy discussion. An year of release must now comfort us, as it did them. Under equal masters, and for eminent services, their time of service was shortened. Gentle treatment was to be ever their due, with proper food and clothing. Such too, was the obvious law of nature. The cruel taskmaster, then was, still is, and ever will be, an object of horror.

^a Verse 22, &c.

^d Chap. xx. 19.

^b Consider Jam. iv. ult.

^c Compare Lev. xxv. 39.

^e From verse 33.

Deut. xv. 12.

In principal human respects, all are the same. Compassion, next to piety, is the most excellent of all virtues ; hence the seventh year was accounted a kind of sacred one to the whole land ^a. If in the course of service, lawful children were born to them, there was a choice left ^b. They would oftenest agree, it may be supposed, to make out their time together, with more than strict legal compensation. The lesser differences it is needless much to notice. What a happy freedom have we to rejoice under !

Love to a good master might be gratified, as love to good laws are ^c. Where a new right was to be authorized by some regular judge, and before witnesses, a token of union to the family was to be given at the door-post, quite expressive, and yet not painful, or in any degree disgraceful. The words, for ever, may be limited to another *Jubilee year*, or to the master's death.

What follows, as to a daughter, is of more difficult interpretation. Nothing rash should be concluded from what is dubious. There was a customary season for contracting, in order to marriage, among the Jews. Then the female looks and temper were to be thought of, and if not found to his mind, the espoused might refuse to consummate, upon equitable terms. Before proposals, he ought to have weighed the matter more seriously. He could not give her away to one of a different nation, and to be subjected to other regulations. Read the scripture narrative. Inconveniences from want of civilization as yet were unavoidable, and to make them as few as might be, was the best that could be done. Happy people who come nighest to the original institute.

XI. CAPITAL CRIMES.

Chap. xxi. 12. *He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death.*

FROM the text, to verse 22, several heinous crimes are enumerated. Blood for blood was an old statute, and

^a Read from verse 3, and compare Lev. xxv. 41. ^b Verse 4, &c. ^c Verse 5, &c.

is here again confirmed. A thorough judicial inquiry was to be made. Smiting in anger was to be no excuse, but more deliberate murder did enhance the crime. What was casual, as in verse 13, did admit of much alleviation, and yet to a certain degree did suffer: They were to fly to an appointed place for refuge, till trial should be made. A rash use of deadly weapons is blameable. Times and parts should be carefully considered ^b. Where is an appointment of three such cities? Great care is due to life ^c.

To lie in wait for murdering is savage cruelty ^c; not to be pardoned. Parricide doth sadly aggravate ^d; nor priests, nor worship, can avail such.

Man-stealing, and that of children, are to be regarded as mortal crimes ^e, as being torture to many at once; above all descriptions worse than death, to pure relative affection. How long notwithstanding has the purchase and sale of human souls been continued! Murders from thence innumerable have taken place.

So much as to curse a father and mother is capital guilt: Superlatively malicious ^f: Not to be enlarged upon. Strifes among neighbours, that do not issue in immediate death, are not to be capitally punished, even where there has been great danger. Loss of time, ease, and labour, ought to be compensated. Attend well to ^g: Even just prosecutions should be carried on with mildness. The cases which follow ^h may now be easily understood, and yet, as momentous, should be read. To govern selfishness and anger, are great duties. The covetous would draw in all to themselves ⁱ.

XII. DISCOURSE.

Chap. xxii. 1, &c. *If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.*

HERE follows regulations for goods or property. In determining controverted matters of this sort, the jud-

a Deut. xix. 2, &c.

b Num. xxxv. 12.

c Verse 14, &c.

d Deut. xix. 13.

e Verse 16, &c.

f Lev. xx. 9. g Matth. v. 21. Jani. ii. 2. ---iv. ult. h Verse 20 of our chapter.

i Jani. i. 21, 26.---iii. 13, &c. Matth. vi. 14, 15. Rom. xiii. ult.

ges had much left in their power, as to mitigation or otherwise. Thus stealing ^a might be aggravated variously; yet not so as to be capital. Read the text: Sheep and goats, going in herds, were more under the eye of their keeper, than large straying cattle. Besides food, oxen were much used both for domestic and field services ^b. The cause upon both sides, was to be heard.

The law made a difference likewise, in the case of confession ^c. To be found breaking up, and under clouds of night, did heighten the crime not a little ^d, and might be smitten to death. The intention of the house-breaker is to be understood, as willing to kill, rather than be taken, or lose his booty. Yet exceptions were allowed for sake of restoring, if spared, or to be sold for a time, below that of six years.

From the narrow extent of Jewish land, and obligation upon families to be industrious, the protection of grounds was most requisite ^e: A passage to be well considered. In certain cases, the number of cattle could not otherwise be maintained. Even scarcity itself was not a full excuse.

Fire, breaking out from carelessness, was also understood to be a great crime ^f, and to be amply repaid. Distances of things combustible were much to be attended to: Effects otherwise might be no less than dreadful. Impartial strict justice becomes essential here, and servants to be often warned.

Matters kept in trust demand special regard ^g. If stolen, and recovered, both the owner and his friend were to share in a mulct. If not found, strict inquisition was to be made by judges ^h. And applicable to each of the former cases occasionally.

Cattle lent did demand special care ⁱ. So in the cases of lending and hiring ^k. Wonderful Divine condescension to human affairs!

a Verse 1. b Verse 9. c Lev. vi. from the beginning d Verse 2. e Verse 3.
f Verse 6. g Verse 7. h Verse 11. i Verse 10. k Mic. vi. 8.

XIII. OF BORROWING, &c.

Chap. xxii. 14. *And if a man borrow ought of his neighbour, and it be hurt, or die, the owner thereof being not with it; he shall surely make it good.*

ATTENTION to what people borrow is most due. The lender here is understood to have expected no secular return; an aggravation of loss from criminal carelessness, unjust, as well as ungrateful.

When proper attention was given, no legal compulsative was to have place, but pious submission. In all mercenary cases, the price agreed upon was to be paid. Where only the outlines of law are given, there is much room left for what is equitable.

What follows from verse 16 has more difficulty in it; and yet merits scrupulous interpretation. To lie with an unbetrothed maid carnally did require a competent maintenance afterwards; and to live with her as married. A nice point in morals. Force is quite out of the question. A character for chastity is sacred, and demands the utmost possible reparation.

Avoid enticing dalliance. Even where marriage is seriously intended, bad effects may follow. A rigorous condemnation is justly due to brutal force; even that of a dowry is less than just ^a. Under a purer dispensation than that of Moses, more regard to conscience will be had. Parental powers were wisely great in those early ages, as appears from ver. 17.

Wicked arts, practised to encourage prostitution, is the vilest of all witchcraft. They deserve not to live in any civilized land ^b. Certain meats and drinks are said to have that effect. What in dark ages went by the name of familiar spirits are not so pestive as those professional traders. Thank God, the existence of the former is now become dubious. Our Christian books take no notice of them. Illusive arts have

^a Deut. xxii. 28, 29.

^b Verse 18 of our chapter

ever passed for magical among the unlearned, and been the foundation of much malicious cruelty. Our own annals are stained with shocking accounts. Superior light has dispelled satanish compacts. Even pretenders of them were to be censured and punished, in great wisdom.

What follows ^a is full of horror, and a case, as one would think, but just supposable. Let such infamous die the death. This was the madness of idolaters, in its utmost pitch; as appears from the next verses. Images of gross impurity were, and still are, to be found in Pagan countries to be seen and worshipped.

O how thankful ought we to be for the gospel? What means of knowledge, virtue and happiness doth it afford ^b. Let iniquity as ashamed hide its face! That of unbelief in particular.

XIV. THE POOR CONSIDERED.

Chap. xxii. 21. *Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*

EVERY kind of want and suffering is pitiable; though some more than others. Explicit laws relative to such ought to be most desirable. To vex is not so criminal in common as to oppress. Both may be easily understood. Even to upbraid for bypast ignorance or misconduct, is vexatious insult, and often cruel. Peculiarly poignant in foreign lands^c. Experience of the like should teach this forcibly^d. Inferior attainments may become high. Let none endanger such progression.

To afflict the widow and fatherless child are enormous crimes^e; being objects tenderly compassionate. They seem to include every other as proverbial^f. Even a look or word of rash displeasure ought to be withheld. Let civility and kindness, as much as possible, help to balance their heavy trials. They are a special branch of the divine charge. Their

a Verse 19th.

b Psal. lxxxix. 15, &c.

c See Psal. cxxxvii. 1, &c.

d Compare Tit. iii. 3.

e Verse 22d.

f See Job xxix. 12. 13.

pain and want, when aggravated, ascend as a cry of vengeance to heaven. There is no wrath in God, nor any passion, yet will he so retaliate, as from this. See the scripture narrative. Temporal judgements, under the law of Moses, were more frequent than now, yet do they sometimes happen ^g.

Lending to the poor, without usury, is often most generous, and even preferable to alms ^h. Family possessions among the Jews were unalienable; might therefore regulate the affair of usury; which, to a reasonable extent, might be taken from strangers. As a matter of trade, like buying and selling, we may not suppose it to be unlawful. Interest upon interest from the known indigent is detestable. Where simple punctual restoration is only sought, time should be kept to a very scruple, and with great thankfulness. An opposite method is hideous ingratitude. Even involuntary hindrances should be fairly and modestly owned.

To take pledges from the poor is rarely, if ever, lawful ⁱ. Raiment, or according to others, a coverlid for a bed, even for a short space, may be matter of great hurt ^k. A regard to cleanliness, in a warm climate, might be a secondary reason, besides being humane. Who can say, what a night-cold, or other inconveniences might produce?

The highest approach to God is to imitate him, as dear children ^l. How worthy then are such minutenesses of their divine author! To overcome evil with good is the glory of human kind! Amen.

XV. SPECIAL PUBLIC DUTIES.

Chap. xxii. 28. *Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people.*

THE duties of subjects to their civil rulers stand in close connection with those of a religious nature ^m.

^g James ii. 13. Matth. v. 7. ^h See Deut. xxiii. 19, 20. ⁱ Verse 26.

^k See Deut. xxiv. from verse 10th.

^l Eph. v. 1.

^m Rom. xiii. 1, &c. ¹ Tim. ii. 1, &c. John x. 35. compared with verse 28. of our chapter, and Psal. lxxxii. 6.

Neither more nor less ought judges and magistracy to be debased. Words of bad import may produce turbulence and sedition. Wherever there is reviling, success in high office is much hazarded. Judges and rulers are as parents to their country.

The best we have is ever due to ALMIGHTY GOD ^a. Harvest festivals ought to be accompanied with pious gratitude. So those of every other kind ^b. Support in decency is due to regular priesthood ^c. Happy abolishment now of every thing merely ritual.

People in covenant with GOD should be peculiarly holy ^d. Separated to him as a special treasure ^e. What is corrupt may not prejudice creatures of strong appetite like dogs. Regulations for humanity and health are worthy of divine regard, and to be imitated.

It is hideous to injure another by false reports ^f, or hastily taking up what is slanderous ^g. Herein judges ought to be exemplary in keeping closs to evidence. Complaints are not to be admitted in absence of the accused. Decline the testimony of wicked men as much as possible. An oath should rarely be administered, till after serious warning; nor ought witnesses to be led ^h. Yielding wrong measures to a multitude is criminal, wherever it can be prevented. Judges should be guarded against the lawyer's art and eloquence, no less than the power of station and wealth. Trials by jury are honourable to a country. The trust is awful.

Poverty and pain are apt to move tender affections ⁱ against justice itself ^k.

XVI. EQUITIES.

Chap. xxiii. 4. *If thou meet thine enemy's ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again.*

SOME injustices are not always remediable by laws. GOD and conscience require what is equal, as in verse 4th,

a Verse 29. b See Deut. xviii. 4. c Compare chap. xxxiv. 19, 20. with verse 30th of our chapter. d Verse 13. chap. xix. 6. e Deut. xiv. 2. f Chap. xxiii. 1. g Psal. xv. 3. h Jer. v. 2. compare with verse 2d of our chapter. i Verse 3. k See Deut. i. 16, 17.

relative to an enemy's ox or ass. In such case the provocation is not to be regarded, but the poor animal cared for. Labour and some expence are not to be refused. See this applied to smaller matters ^a. The most causeless foes are men and brethren ^b. We must hasten to help such, unless worse than beasts; we should pity the overburdened animal ^c. Not to assist is in effect to destroy ^d.

Want of money or friends to prosecute right, should not be taken advantage of ^e. Leave general human conduct to an unerring Judge ^f. While guilt is unproved, the person of a pannel should be held as sacred. Procèsses for condemnation are to be carried on maturely, and agreeable to evidence ^g; avoiding things blinding, like a gift. Respect not persons, but law and equity ^h.

The heart of a stranger is easily affected ⁱ. Special courteousness is due to such ^k. Sojourning itself is a sufficient trial ^l.

Good husbandry is beneficial to the poor ^m. What may be useful to beasts merits human regard. We may thus learn from inanimate nature itself. Levites all along were to have a subsistence portion. Ground increases strength by lying for a time. It would seem that the nigher we come to Jewish customs in cultivation of soils, we improve them the more. Their loftiest hills were rendered productive from the bottom to top, by proper divisions, to catch the off-falls from each story: hence their abundance and population next to incredible, when they did well.

Mutual love and gentleness do constitute great branches of religion. These, with firm trust in God, are sure preservatives. Beware of covetousness ⁿ.

a Deut. xxii. 3.

b Verse 5.

c James ii. 13.

d James iv. ult.

e Verse 6.

f Verse 7.

g Verse 8.

h Prov. xvii. 8.

i Verse 9. compare chapter xxii. 21.

k 1 Peter iii. 8. l See Deut. xxvii. 19.

m Verse 10, &c.

n See Lev. xxv. 2.

XVII. JEWISH FEASTS.

Chap. xxiii. 14. *Three times thou shalt keep a feast unto me in the year.*

SOLEMN annual Festivities were to commemorate grand events, as piously grateful, and leading to obedience. Specially bound upon the male sex, who were in condition to travel. Hence, surrounding idolatrous customs were guarded against. The Passover ^a was first and chief of these, explained at large in a former discourse, from chapters xii. and xiii. Presents among the Easterns were, and still are, tokens of respect and love, each to differ agreeable to people's abilities.

In the harvest feast which follows, fruits of the season would no doubt be brought ^b. All conducive to cheerfulness. The more when accompanied with pure spiritual sentiments. Family religion has a special joyous sweetness in it, and is otherwise of great use. Consider attentively the repetition ^c, for the name pentecost, or fifty. Much was left to women's own option and state. From divine glorious appearances, what they did offer are frequently termed in scripture sacrifices of seeing ^d. Much care in that warm climate was due to their flesh meat ^e.

Delicacy of sensation is to be regarded every where, but most of all in places of worship. The earliest and best fruits are due to heaven ^f. Then too, was the law promulgated from Mount Sinai ^g. Impressive with the whole nation as the young grew up.

The third great annual feast was that of the tabernacles, probably referred to verse 19th, Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk. Against cruelty in general. A sight of two such animals united demands a gentle movement of the heart. Possibly too, what the text prohibits might oppose

^a Verse 15.

^b Compare Lev. xxiii. 10.

^c Verse 17.

likewise chap. xxxiv. 22.

^d Compare with verse 18. chap. xxxiv. 25.

^e See Lev. xix. 6.

^f Verse 19.

^g Compare Lev. xxiii. 17.

some heathenish idolatrous custom, when the first fruits were so plenty: for like reason ^a, and among others. By promise of an angel or messenger for guidance, Israel is encouraged to obedience. This might mean no more than a glorious appearance, from which God was to act, as in verse 21st. God's name is that of power and authority ^b. Imitate none of the evil customs you may happen to see. Reflect with delight upon Heb. x. 24, 25.

XVIII. DIVINE ENGAGEMENTS TO THE JEWS.

Chap. xxiii. 25. *And ye shall serve the LORD your GOD, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee.*

THE covenant of God with Israel was far inferior to that under the gospel ^c. Yet, being a preparation-step for better things, we should understand, as we are able, what the Jewish advantages were, from verse 25th of our chapter. Under water and bread are comprehended all the necessities of life, with health, and even conveniences outward ^d.

A very singular judgement upon Israel's foes is spoken to ^e. Wasps of large size, gnats or bees may assist the imagination here; when they are molested, painful and venomous. In executing the above, for wise reasons assigned ^f, there was to be a gradation. Beasts of prey, it is well known, do occupy fast, where there are no human beings to prevent them. For several ages this was the case in Britain.

Miracles are not interposed where natural means are sufficient; whence their moment becomes so much the more conspicuous. By breathing times to Israel, their number and strength did increase ^g.

a Deut. xvi. 21. b Compare 1 Kings viii. 16. c Heb. viii. 6. &c. to the end.

d See verse 26, 27, &c. compare Joshua ii. 9, 10.—iii. 11, &c.

e Verse 28, which should be read, and after this Judges chap. iii. from the beginning, and Joshua xxiv. 12. Deut. vii. 20. f Verse 29, 30.

g Compare 2 Sam. viii. from the beginning, with 1 Kings iv. 21, 24.

Thus

Thus too, was nearly fulfilled ^b. To covenant with idolaters was in effect to covenant with their gods, and to occasion dreadful hurt. Such an occurrence, and by such means, is not to be equalled in history; all in demonstration of divine truth, wisdom, justice, and even goodness to our world in general. Likewise that God is one.

XIX. THE OLD COVENANT.

Chap. xxiv. 3. *And Moses came, and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgements: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.*

MOSEs seems to have received some new orders, besides these in chapter xxth and 21st, to be published after a solemn manner, and to which the whole body of the people were to give their assent.

With this view, he rose up early, and builded an altar with twelve pillars, answering to the like number of tribes. The seventy elders, now well known from chapter xviii. 12, might speak and act as Israel. Young men are sent ^b to sacrifice certain animals, by way of peace-offerings unto the LORD. Till now, that had been the privilege of the first born, in each of their families ^c, and was afterwards more limited to that of Aaron. None above fifty were permitted to act in so laborious a service.

And Moses ^d took half of the blood, and put it in basons for subsequent use, and half he took and sprinkled upon the altar of God, to denote his engaging to fulfil all promises hitherto made ^e. He read in audience of the people, probably the two tables. And they said, in return by the seventy deputed elders, all that the LORD hath so said, we will do. A solemn covenant engagement alluded to ^f. Both most

a Verse 33d in our chapter.

b Verse 5.

c Chap. xix. 22.

d Verse 6. e See chap. xxiii. from verse 25th. and the book of the covenant referred to, Chap. xxiv. 4.

f Matth. xxvi. 28.

amazingly condescending upon the part of GOD, and binding upon that of men. And Moses took the blood from out of the bason, mentioned verse 6th, and sprinkled it on the people by their representatives, saying, behold the blood which doth ratify your obligation, in hope of Divine favour.

Both terms and promises were thus set up in the blood of slain beasts, as afterwards, under the new covenant, in that of GOD's own son ^a. Then, with Moses, the people represented as above came towards the Mount, and saw what was emblematically glorious of the Divine presence, and yet no image ^b. Read the scripture narrative. The grandeur must have been surpassing. A kind of internal witness ^c, where covenant vows are uprightly made, such pious souls are brought nigh to GOD ^d. They hold sweet assimilating intercourse. If the foot-stool of the ALMIGHTY was sapphire like, what must his immediate celestial presence be? The sight of the Mount did hurt none of the noble chosen spectators ^e. Placidity in the main did keep them from fainting. And such still are pure elevated religious joys. Advancing vigour and glory will be their final portion. What a privilege, to be uniformly and steadfastly good.

The book of GOD was not, as yet, written with a Divine hand ^f. A full proof to the whole twelve tribes was to be expected. There are trials of faith in the several gradations of it, which should be modestly submitted to. Preferences given to others should not be envied, being all for common good.

XX. THE TABLES OF STONE.

Chap. xxiv. 12. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Come up to me into the Mount, and be there : and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written ; that thou mayest teach them.*

WHAT had been repeated memorially, or from some written book, the LORD did call upon Moses to re-

a Heb. viii. 6, 10. b Deut. iv. 15. c Gen. i. 3. d 1 Jo. i. 3. e Verse 11, 17.
f Verse 12.

ceive from himself, written upon tables of stone ^a : Most like it was an audible loud call ; to be the more authoritative and binding. None save himself were allowed to go up so high ^b, and to abide full forty days and nights, by way of trial to late solemn covenant engagements.

The divine law has for no length of time been left to memory, or tradition alone ; taking mankind as a body. Transmission by writing is both more permanent, and generally acceptable. Such a method as was now to be made use of, if it did not give rise to scripture or pen, was in great aid to each. And even with all the advantages of written revelation, parents, by teaching and devout songs, should be careful to transmit ^c. To the melancholy neglect of this may be imputed the progression of ignorance and vice, in most places of the world, even those professing the gospel unexcepted. Worse things a great deal are kept up by song. The narrative ^d will be found a special good help. Before leaving the elders, they had a charge given them ^e, which should be read. Age and knowledge together were thought even by Moses to be proper grounds for trust ^f.

After the chief servant of the LORD had passed through a cloud ^g, this glory did appear upon the top of the mount ^h. A solemn scene, taking the whole together. Flashes of fire, in midst of darkness, appear tremendous. A voice from GOD on the seventh day is now become familiar to Moses ; majestic, yet consoling. If this, as some suppose, was the Sabbath, what a blissful one ! How would the people beneath look, think, and speak ⁱ ! Nor cloud, nor fire did intimidate, where GOD shone forth. All this while, his support must have been supernatural. .

In all great undertakings, it seems to be every one's duty to wait for somewhat like a DIVINE command, such as regularity, and probable usefulness. A good meaning is not quite enough. On the other hand, inclination joined with ability, and advice of superiors are as calls from above. Those left in trust should be anxious about discharge.

a Verse 12.

b Verse 17.

c Col. iii. 16.

d from verse 13, that of

Chap. xxxii. verse 15.

e Verse 14.

f Compare Chap. xviii. 22.

g Verse 12.

h Verse 16.

i Compare Psal. xcvi. 2, 3.

Exod. xl. 35.

XXI. PIOUS OFFERINGS.

Chap. xxv. 2. *Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering : Of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.*

GOD was pleased to order the building of an ark, and tabernacle, for keeping such accounts of the law, as had been hitherto received ; and whence occasionally they might be received : The sum of which takes up most of this chapter ; therefore to be read. They were each to spare from their treasures for pious uses, and all from the heart. To grudge is worse than not to give. Cheerfulness is more than quantity ^a. The offering, at this time, was to be gold, and silver, and brass, all equivalent in their value with God, who judges according to the truth of inward affection. So verse 4, different kinds of furniture, needless to be enumerated. As to nature, quality, and quantity, the willing heart was to be left free. Compare for what deficiencies, after all might be ^b. A like kind of taxation in behalf of the poor may still be made.

What wood was given was to be of sweet perfume, at once agreeable and healthful. What is superb, God doth not require, but what is decent. Mechanical feelings are pleasant, and yet far inferior to such as are pure and rationally devout ^c.

The dimensions of the ark, from verse 10, are matters of easy reading, if we but observe, that every cubit comes nearest to our foot and a half. Even the ground-works of gold were not comparable to the tables of stone : A mercy-seat, or propitiatory over the law, was admirably impressive of pardon, and good hope to the upright. Cherubims too were shadows of what ingenuous obedience would lead to ^d. Making of beautiful statuary work was not prohibited ; but worshipping, or bowing down to them.

^a Luke xxi. 3. 5. Exod. xxxv. 5. Eph. vi. 8.
xxxviii. 24, &c. ^c See Jo. iv. 23, 24.

^b Chap. xxx. 12, &c.----
^d Heb. xii. 22, &c.

Here ALMIGHTY love was to meet, and commune with his ancient people, when obedient ^a. What condescension ! How inexcusable their revolts ! Yet frequent, very frequent these became, and just to be neighbour-like. Also, was a table of shew-bread to be set, marking Divine goodness, if they would be grateful, not only to forgive, but amply recompence. A lustre in the night season, to shine upon all. The whole admirably adapted to affect the early human mind. But upon that very grandeur, and the number of their privileges, they presumed too much. An awful warning even to Christians ^b.

XXII. THE ARK AND TABERNACLE.

Chap. xxvi. 1. *Moreover, thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet ; with cherubims of cunning work shalt thou make them.*

THE ark, highly ornamented, was to be put into a tabernacle ; next in description. Though each nicety relative to it may not now be clearly understood, few if any bad effects may follow from this. It was a kind of portable tent ; the earliest place for Jewish set worship, upon their grand occasions, before building of the temple. For convenience of transportation, it could be taken to pieces with ease, and the same way erected. What is most material to know, was its inside division by a veil, separating the *Holy of Holies* from all the rest. Herein, as most dignified, the law was deposited ; the propitiatory or mercy seat, with the two golden cherubims. Hence, also the oracles of heaven were published from time to time. Just on the outside of this ^c, stood the altar of incense, curiously wrought, and overlaid with gold ; the table on which the shew-bread was to be laid, and the great golden candlestick, or lamp scone of seven branches, all made of rich materials. Read the whole narrative ^d. A divine pattern was given to Moses.

^a Verse 22. ^b Matth. vii. 21, &c. ^c Chap. xxvii. ^d Chap. xxv. from ver. 36.

Sometimes on account of its contents, the ark is styled the ark of the covenant, testimony or law ^c. To which Heb. ix. 5. may allude in part. A worldly sanctuary, and all now superseded, in a gloriously spiritual one; God's own son.

The tabernacle was usually removed from one place of encampment unto another ^e; when an immediate great miracle was wrought by it. So when the walls of Jericho fell. After this, it was pitched for some good while in Shiloh; as commodious for the whole ^f. From thence, we find it brought to Mizpah ^g.

Upon a sad provocation given to God, he suffered the Philistines to carry it to Ashdod, or Azotus, and to be placed in the temple of an idolatrous god, *Dagon*: Such a trophy, however, they could not keep safe, even there. The next day the idol fell, and after another upset was broken in pieces. The male heathen worshippers too were smote with a terrible disease, which led them to remove it to Gath, where a similar painful disease did follow the males, in honour of Israel's God. Still the like vengeance pursued them to Ekron: After which, they were glad to have it sent back; with what they understood, as a valuable offering, to atone for their impious deeds. And thus by punishing Israel, was the knowledge of the true God spread.

Certain persons in Bethshemesh did presume to look into it as they could, but were slain in multitudes. Thence it was brought to Kirjath-jearim, another city in the same tribe of Judah, where it remained twenty-three years. By this time, idolatries did much abound, for lack of right worship; in all cases, a sure forerunner of ignorance, superstition, and vice.

Afterwards Samuel arose, who, under God, did reform multitudes. David, who succeeded Saul first king of Israel, would have brought the ark sooner to Jerusalem, but was discouraged, even from motives of piety ^h. By a rash act of Uzziah, he was made an example of Divine vengeance, and the ark left at Obed-Edom three months.

^c Deut. x. 5.

^e Jos. iii. 6.

^f Ex. xxxiv. 23.

^g Jud. xx. 27.

---1 Sam. iv. 4.

^h 2 Sam. vi. throughout.

Thence

Thence it was brought with great solemnity to Jerusalem^a: Referred to Psalm cxxxii. 24. in noble stanzas suited to every different movement. Here it was kept, till taken into the temple by king Solomon, in pompous form; and did remain until the Babylonish captivity. Uncertain if ever after this the Jews possessed the ark. The tabernacle itself underwent various changes of place and keeping. In general, the temple was the chief resort for divine worship, and the name of tabernacle therefore often ascribed to it. Few will suffer from so minute an account.

XXIII. AARON AND HIS SONS.

Chap. xxviii. 1. *And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons.*

FOR understanding the Jewish religion, it is of prime importance to be acquainted with the nature of their priesthood, in the house of Aaron and his sons; the former as chief, and the rest subordinated^b. Their profession was honourable, and all of the Levitical tribe^c. It may be out of respect to Moses. They had not a little share likewise, in the administration of civil affairs.

Their maintenance was^d by a tenth of the first-fruits out of the other tribes, besides incidental offerings: An ample income. The gospel kingdom is much more spiritual, and not to be regulated quite from the above. Competence, and leisure for study, should be allowed to teaching ministers^d. The garments of Aaron are styled holy^e; as keeping up a visible distinction in beauty and lustre. Also literally consecrated, to affect priests and people. Now more an optional affair, than any thing else. Decency will ever be proper.

The breast-plate and ephod, then were the most ornamental, and possibly useful parts of the high priest's dress, &c.; at

^a 1 Chr. xv. 25.
^c Num. iii. 11.

^b 2 Kings xxiii. 4. Neh. iii. 1.
^d Compare Num. xviii. 20, 21. ^e Verse 2.

this distance of time, not easy to explain. Probable shadows of inward light and fervour, leading to good works : Some say we have no English word, to answer that of *ephod* ^a. How uninteresting. Such wonderful arts of working might have been inspired ^b : Also more significant at that time, than we can now conceive. Josephus is high in praise of their extraordinary virtues, but gives no proof ^c. They were to be standing testimonies, at least of Divine care.

The Urim and Thummim ^d have been matter of large discussion among the learned, and yet no certain conclusion can be formed : Sometimes they are spoken of separately, and sometimes together. The one might express knowledge, the other righteousness ; both essential to competent judgement. Not unlikely, they were put in by the hand of Moses himself ^e ; to be the more affecting ^f. Like an oracle ^g. It is thought to have existed no more, after the Babylonish captivity, though the name be retained both by Ezra and Nehemiah. The mitre ^h expresses the glory of the whole ⁱ.

XXIV. CONSECRATION OF PRIESTS.

Chap. xxix. 1. *And this is the thing that thou shalt do unto them, to hallow them, to minister unto me in the priest's office : Take one young bullock, and two rams without blemish.*

FROM a temporal infant æconomy like that of the law, it was unsafe for Christians to borrow so much as they did, in visible splendors, when they came to have it in their power. Hence great hurt to original spiritual simplicity did ensue, as splendours of edifice, utensils, garments, and the like : In effect, too much a kingdom of this world. Consecration of priests, after the Jewish model, was one excess : As shadows of good things to come, they are still fit to be known. The preparatives by sacrifice may be read ^k. Then the manner is narrated ^l ; which ought also to be read. Pureness of

a See Verse 6, and 9, of our chap. b Verse 3. c Compare Verse 12, 29.
d Verse 30, &c. e Lev. viii. 8. f See Num. xxvii. 21. g 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.
h Verse 36, &c. i Verse 28, 40. k Verse 2, &c. l Verse 4, &c.

spirit and practice, was intimated by bodily washing. From their new splendid garments, a general awe would obtain. The mitre, as inscribed, would heighten this ; as to the other particulars, they are less momentous, though suitable to the people and times.

After all, among us, reverence is best kept up by the simple imposition of hands, commemorating that which was apostolical. Consecration offerings ^a may be read in private. An humble and devout frame is set forth by them, both becoming admission into sacred office ; and succeeded naturally by peace offerings ; a kind of mutual intercourse, or sharing. Morning and evening sacrifices, from verse 24, seem to denote a special obligation to be thus regularly devout, and did ensure continued Divine presence ^b. How much more direct and comfortable ^c. To be well considered.

The Jewish priests were to be variously, and ritually qualified, denoting disengagement from the world, and spiritual purity ^d. Compare with the above, Heb. ix. 6. All then already gone through, were images, or shadows of better ; and in so far had their preparative uses. Let none, however, indulge to what is fanciful, but thank God for a clearer, and more liberal dispensation. We need no such successions, as were in the end, most mercenarily abused ^e. A sad presage of their ruin ^f.

XXV. JEWISH OFFERINGS.

Chap. xxx. 10. *And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of it once in a year with the blood of the sin-offering of atonements ; once in the year shall he make atonement upon it, throughout your generations : It is most holy unto the LORD.*

THE place here spoken of was the altar of incense, just by the ark of the testimony ^h ; and where the law was to be deposited, before the mercy-seat. There Aaron and

^a From verse 10 of our chapter. ^b Verse 45, &c. ^c 2 Cor. vi. 16, &c.

^d See Lev. xxi. from near the beginning.

^e See Matth. xxvi. 3, 27. Jo. xi. 29.---xviii. 13, 24. ^g Gen. xlix. 10. ^h Ver. 6.

his successors were to cause sweet spices to be burnt, ever accompanied with suitable spiritual devotions ^a.

One yearly Jewish meeting was very solemn and termed Most Holy to the LORD ^b. An atonement, then, was made for both priest and people, assuring forgiveness of sins for the year past.

Inferior sacrifices may be comprehended under the six following: 1st Such as were wholly burnt: next, meat ones, peace, sin, and trespass-offerings, added to those of the consecration. Burnt-offerings were intended purely to honour ALMIGHTY GOD. A kind of holocaust, and their fumes made odoriferous ^c. Some suppose from chapter ix. 16, 24, that the fire was miraculously kindled ^d.

With regard to meat-offerings, they were a mixture of fine flour, oil, and frankincense made up like cakes without leaven: Of these the priest partook, and burnt part of what remained upon the altar, for the LORD; the rest was kept for the officiating minister's use. Thus were most burnt-offerings accompanied, as may be seen at large ^e.

Peace-offerings were to be presented on two accounts, either to supplicate for peace and safety, or to return thanks ^f. Some special parts were to be burnt, and the rest kept as fees for the priest ^g.

For every sin-offering, it does not appear that the regulations were quite the same, but differed according to the person and offices of those who brought them ^h. Such sacrifices as were expiatory or atoning, except the annual one, were to be eaten and burnt as above.

The trespass-offering was to be for wilful deliberate crimes, either of neglect, or commission, Lev. chapter vii. affords here great light.

Inferior offerings require much less of our attention, and may be seen most of them ⁱ.

a Compare Luke i. 10.

b Compare Heb. v. 1.—viii. 2.

c See Lev. vi. 12. likewise chap. i.

d Compare Lev. x. 1.

e Lev. ii. likewise chap. vi. from verse 14.

f Lev. iii. from the beginning.

g Alluded to Psal. cxvi. 12.

h See Lev. iv. throughout, and compare Heb. xiii. 11. 12.

i From Lev. chap. xii. to chap. xv. compare Luke ii. 22. Heb. ix. 13.

Incense was happily expressive of acceptable spiritual devotion; often alluded to in scripture. Thus speaks an ancient Jew, Philo, who lived about the time of our LORD, "A pious thanksgiving, offered up by a pure innocent heart, is more acceptable to heaven, than all the other pompous ceremonies of devotion: in as much as gold is better than rough stone; the inside of the temple more honourable than the outside; the smell of incense more fragrant than the steams of burnt sacrifices." Without this of incense no other sacrifice was entered upon ^a.

XXVI. THE GOLDEN CALF.

Chap. xxxii. 1. *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the Mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.*

NEVER do the people of Israel appear in a more disagreeable light than now ^b; finding that Moses did not return so soon as they did wish for, in a body they rebel. Read the passage, at once ridiculous and ungrateful! Was the servant of JEHOVAH to do otherwise than agreeable to divine command?

They would not only sin, but after the manner of their late Egyptian oppressors. Worse than child. ^a. They either use no arguments, or they are left out, as contemptible. Better might they say, One god we can see than no god at all. Disgraceful! Yet Aaron had not fortitude like his brother, to oppose their wickedness. Up and delay not, say the infamous multitude. Perhaps Aaron might hope to quiet them by his stratagem, verse 2d, but it was a dangerous one. They would part with any thing sooner than their present evil humour. He might next flatter himself, that the image was only to be

^a Compare 2 Chron. v. 12, 13. Psal. l. 13. Isa. i. 11, &c.

^b Compare chap. xxiv. 14.

used by way of emblem as to the divine presence. At bottom a cowardly evasion. To a right state of mind, the clear letter of law is every thing.

Still the cloud and pillar of fire might encompass the Mount, which aggravates their impatient guilt ^a. The people in their madness bring ear-rings and other next to worshipped jewels ^b. And Aaron received them ^c, when he should have boldly spurned at their design. But mobbish fury prevails. He casts a mould, and the calf is produced for polishing. Here we can form no excuse for the brother of Moses. To call it pusillanimity is by far too mild. His skill brought from Egypt was much abused, in forming Apes, one of their Idol-deities ^d.

When Aaron saw how this pleased the people, he went on still to gratify them more ^e. Read what yet is distressing to think of ^f. The offence was hideous, as may be understood from the subsequent narrative to verse 9th. Like to stubbornness indeed itself. Words put into the mouth of God are spoken in the manner of men, for in him there is no passion. A great trial to Moses' public spirit. Read to the end of verse 14th. In his agony of grief he uses strong expressions, and familiar kind of arguments, with which the wonderful condescending grace of God is pleased. Repenting signifies no more than a change of outward measures ^g.

XXVII. MOSES' RESENTMENT.

Chap. xxxii. 15. *And Moses turned, and went down from the Mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written.*

AS dark ground-work sets off more lively colouring, so doth the last disagreeable subject what follows. Moses,

a Compare Joshua xxiv. 19.

b Verse 3.

c Verse 4.

d See Psal. cvii. 19, 20. Isa. xlvii. from verse 6. Deut. iv. 15. Neh. ix. 18.

e Verse 5.

f Compare Acts vii. 41. 1 Cor. x. 7.

g Jam. i. 17.

unregardful

unregardful of himself, in comparison, warmly intercedes for offending Israel. Be merciful great LORD, for thy name's sake, is the substance of his earnest, pure patriotic prayer. As a saint of prime magnitude, he is allowed to plead at large, and is an example which, with modesty, may be followed.

Then did the ALMIGHTY change from his threatened measures of displeasure, signified by the word repent. Moses is still under considerable degree of ire, and having the two engraved tables of GOD in his hand, he, upon sight and hearing of Israel's continued madness, said ^a, it is the voice of wicked merriment. Then unable to contain himself at a nigher approach ^b, he cast the tables out of his hand, so that they brake; and the people, not daring to move, he took the calf and burnt it in the fire, it is probable at which they did sacrifice: then ground it to powder and strewed the ashes upon water. Heroic motion, if not a divine impulse. Yea, he made certain of them to drink in part of their idol-god.

Nor did he spare his brother ^c, for the share he had in so horrible an iniquity. Read the good man's words. A work of such degradation and wretchedness could admit of no excuse ^d. The words of fright and self-condemnation. Humility however is pitiable. He makes no lies, but speaks what was weak, like confessed cowardice. It came out a calf is of very dubious import, if not worse. We are moved to condemn so oblique an answer. But crime added to crime is no rare thing in the world.

Thus naked to their shame in the eye of GOD, as they had been stripped of their Jewels ^e; Moses in the gate, a most conspicuous place of the camp, invites those who would be upon the LORD's side, to come unto him, which the sons of Levi, abhorrent of all idolatry, did embrace. To them he gave an authoritative power, to slay each their man, by way of punishing what they had done. If, as some suppose, the transgressors of leading order were literally naked, as certain idolaters did obscenely worship, they would be easier known by that means, as most obnoxious to capital punishment; and that the children

^a Verse 7.

^b Verse 19.

^c Verse 21.

^d See verse 22.

^e Verse 25.

of Levi did execute ^a, to the number of three thousand men. Dreadful to think of, however just. Without like authority, no such cruel measures are to be taken ^b. Where people penitentially humble themselves, mercy may be hoped for ^c. The intercession by Moses is truly affecting, and should be read. He was willing to die, rather than Israel should be extirpated. He succeeds, but with a solemn proper certification ^d.

XXVIII. MOSES INTERCEDES.

Chap. xxxiii. 7. *And Moses took the tabernacle, and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the Tabernacle of the Congregation. And it came to pass, that every one which sought the LORD went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp.*

AFTER the above melancholy transaction, Moses receives an order ^e, to lead the people thence, with the tabernacle of his special presence, which he accordingly did. Read the narrative.

The tabernacle was to be placed without the camp, at once to humble Israel, and to intimate the danger of an entire remove even thence, if they did afterwards apostatize. Wise and gracious discipline ^f. They fear and yet hope for tidings of complete pardon. Justice and mercy, they now think of as the habitation of the divine throne ^g, which was acceptable belief. Compare with that tremendous appearance ^h.

Some are of opinion that Joshua returned with Moses to the camp, by a different translation of the Hebrew words, which seems to be the truth. Some while after this, but when or where is uncertain, with humble reverence Moses spoke unto the LORD ⁱ. He requests in effect that the directing pillar might not be withdrawn ^k, as a further token of his

a Verse 28. b James iii. 13, &c. c Verse 30, &c. d Verse 33, &c.

e Chap. xxxii. 34. f Compare verse 3, &c. g See verse 10.

h Chap. xxiv. 17. i Verse 12 read and compare chap. xxxii. 24---xxxiii. 1.

k Verse 15.

increasing favour, and patriotically pleads for the people as yet covenanted to him ^l. In all which he is graciously condescended to ^m. Some translate, Moses had said, &c. and then, verse 16, continues his intercessory pleadings, which was, indeed, a familiar allowance, and still in part not refused to earnest modest saints.

Even very heinous offences may be in some sort blotted out, upon repentance. Such true godly sorrow cannot be at ease without proper evidences. Whence, said the LORD to Moses, I will make all my goodness to pass before thee ⁿ. What cannot be seen in splendour, may be known so far as beneficial.

XXIX. THE COVENANT RENEWED.

Chap. xxxiv. 10. *And he said, Behold, I make a covenant ; before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation ; and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD : for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee.*

AFTER a shocking breach of covenant made with Israel ^o, through the intercession of Moses, they are forgiven, and a renewal of that same covenant is agreed to. All demanding special marks of reverence as before ^p.

Agreeably to order, Moses ^q did hew two tables of stone, like those which had been broken, and went up with them into the Mount, yet unwritten. The rest should be perused with pious care. Mark well the gracious name ^r. Phrases so varied exhibit special tenderness, like that of parents to their offspring ; pure, disinterested, communicative ^s. His promises to the penitent are exceeding great and precious ^t.

After all, the state of the impenitent is hopeless ^u. Moses,

^l Exod xxiv. from the beginning.

^m Agreeable to verse 14th of our chapter. ⁿ Verse 19, &c. ^o Chap. xxiv. 1, &c. ^p Chap. xix. 13. ^q Verse 14. of our chapter. ^r Verse 6. The Lord, &c. compare chap. xxxiii. 18---vi. 3. ^s See Gen. xxxiii. 11. Isa. lv. 7.

^t 2 Peter i. 4. compare Psal. cxiv. 6---cxlv. 19, &c. 1 Cor. xiii. 10. Isa. i. 16.

^u Compare Deut. xii. 31.

taking the whole together, is filled with joy of worship. He seems, at the time, to have felt more than he could express. Haste of obedience to such wonderful condescension was most natural; he is humble, familiar and willing to be active. Taking all together a truly religious patriot. Hence the honour done him from verse 10th to be read. Even they who had rebelled should see, and be forced to admire ^a.

Let a covenant of mutual friendship once more be renewed. Their enemies were to be cut off, though not entirely at once ^b. Every future way of idolatrizing was to be guarded against; groves, altars and images destroyed. The name, put to signify the nature of the LORD, is one, and he will admit of no rivalship. From intermarrying with idolaters, the worst of consequences might happen.

XXX. RELIGIOUS PRESERVATIVES.

Chap. xxxiv. 23. *Thrice in the year shall all your men-children appear before the LORD GOD, the GOD of Israel.*

BESIDES guarding against marriage with idolaters, they were, as much as might be, to avoid companionship, and to observe with strict punctuality their own annual solemnities. Read from verse 18th: the feast of unleavened bread, the same as passover, has been explained, chapters xii, xiii, and xxiii. and may be looked over again.

The weekly Sabbaths they were to keep ^c. A wise and most gracious institution.

The feast of weeks, or pentecost, as explained chapter xxiii. 16. they were also to keep. Then too, was their in-gathering, joyous seasons ^d. Devout thanksgiving and hospitality were at this time to be much exercised.

Read with leisure from verse 23d of our chapter. Grown up men-children were specially bound. The reasons assigned are worthy of much thought. The giving of the law was a special object of the pentecost institute. Divine words were

^a Verse 11, &c.

^b Verse 29, 30.

^c Verse 21. compare chap. xx. 9.

^d Compare Deut. xvi. 9.

to be written, and not left to mere memorial tradition ^a. At once plain and momentous. For forty days and forty nights was Moses miraculously preserved, and he wrote as God did command, the words of the covenant : comprehending both religious and civil, or social duties. A glorious blessed summary ! Let the young in particular think of them ^b. Parents and rulers ought to be at pains and expence both, for having the law taught ^c. The neglect of such obligations did ruin ancient Israel, and will ever proportionally hurt other nations. Happy they who live under CHRIST, who came to fulfil the law ^d.

XXXI. MOSES DELIVERS THE TABLES.

Chap. xxxiv. 31. *And Moses called unto them : and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him : and Moses talked with them.*

THE ten commandments were to be for general and lasting use ^e. Whence, to affect his people the more, did the ALMIGHTY so ordain, that before delivery of the tables to them, the face of Moses, from an effulgence upon the Mount, shone unknown to himself, conspicuously, and so as to be seen at a distance.

This would produce awe of divine authority ^f. They were affraid at first to come nigh so great a radiance. In Hebrew, horned, or like a crown, the token of dominion ^g. And Moses ^h called unto them to come, putting away fear, the vail, it is likely, still continuing, saying, These are the words, and so on. It has been thought that all from chapter xxv, to xxxii. inclusive were rehearsed. These are the words, begins the last named chapter, which the LORD commanded. Happily the above is allegorized, 2 Corinthians iii. from verse 7th, to be well attended to with implored aid. A second

^a Verse 11, &c. ^b Exod. xv. 35. Lev. xxvii. 46. Deut. xxx. 16. Num. xxxvi. 13.

^c Deut. xvii. 18 ---- xxxi. 9, 24.

^d Matth. v. 17. and downwards.

^e 2 Tim. i. 10. Psal. lxxxix. 15.

^f Verse 27, 28.

^g Verse 30.

^h Compare Acts ii. from the beginning.

ⁱ Verse 31st of our chapter.

affecting

affecting circumstance with regard to the Jews is to be taken notice of out of the same 2 Corinthians iii. 15th, as an improvement of our narrative. Think of it with tender pity and prayer. A short digression, but useful.

Moses, when he went into the tabernacle, had it in command from the ALMIGHTY ^a, to direct the people as before, which he communicated unto them: the skin of his face, or whole head it may be, still shining. Here was majesty tempered with condescension ^b.

XXXII. FREE-WILL OFFERINGS.

Chap. xxxv. 5. *Take ye from among you an offering unto the LORD: whosoever is of a willing heart let him bring it, an offering of the LORD; gold, and silver, and brass.*

BESIDES commanded sacrifices, the Jews made sometimes voluntary religious donations ^c. That in the text was different. Read the passage with what follows. Even this was not to interfere with the Sabbatical rest ^d. The tabernacle-offering was to be in proportion to people's circumstances, and from the heart; of more consideration than precious metals. Remember the widow's mite ^e.

In avoiding pomp, let us not become slovenly ^f. A willing, pious and beneficent offering is all in all, heartily as unto God and not unto men ^g.

Cleanliness by water, in a warm climate, was a wise religious institute, and emblematical of still better ^h. The cloud of glory, entered upon the tabernacle, did intimidate even Moses himself. As this fell on, or was removed, Israel was to proceed or encamp ⁱ.

^a Verse 34. ^b John i. 14, &c. compare Luke vii. 22.---iv. 22, 36. Matth. xi. 28, &c. Isa. lv. 1, &c. ^c Num. xxix. 39. ^d Isa. lviii. 13, 14.
 ^e 2 Cor. viii. 9, &c. ^f Consider Heb. x. 24, 25. ^g Compare 1 Cor. xvi. 1, &c.
 ^h See Num. xvi. 42.---xi. 17, 25. Deut. xxxi. 14, 15.
 ⁱ Num. ix. 17.---x. 34. Chap. xiii. 21, 22. Deut. v. 22.

XXXIII. LEVITICAL OFFERINGS.

Chap. i. 4. *And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him.*

THE book of Leviticus contains the law which belonged to Jewish religious worship; one chief part whereof was sacrificial, and committed to Aaron the Levite. In this chapter, we read of a call given to Moses ^a, from the tabernacle ^b. He then received orders, how the children of Israel were to manage their different kind of offerings. Most of which have been already spoken to, and the less need now to be insisted on ^c.

Read the scripture narrative here. Bulk and quantity might be varied according to the situation of things; at this distance of time, not so easy to ascertain. Their origin, in general, is an affair of difficult discussion: Not unlikely from above, but in plain form. Surrounding abuses, from ignorance and superstition, might require new circumstances, to counteract them, and to keep the Jews employed. The whole did terminate upon the One Living and True God, and were all figures for the time ^d: to be well thought of.

As for burnt-offerings agreeable to law ^e; where a plain and proper distinction was made between those of the rich and poor. Holocausts, or what was to be wholly consumed, are spoken to ^f. They seem to intimate a kind of transference from themselves to the ALMIGHTY. A creature freely devoted. Whence manumission of slaves seems to have been taken: To form a sure way to future friendship; the same in substance as atonement. Humble and earnest prayer was to attend the whole ^g. Since the coming of our Blessed LORD, such further minutenesses, as may be read from verse 5th of our chapter, are less needful to be attended to.

a Verse 1. &c. b Compare Exod. xl. 35. c See Heb. vii. 11. d Heb. ix. 9, &c.

e Read from verse 3, of our chapter. f Verse 4. g See Chap. xvi. 21.

The first kindling of the sacred fire might be by miracle ; and to be afterwards kept alive by human hands. Of the meat offerings, little requires to be added to the scripture words ^a. A kind of joyous entertainment among near connections ^b.

Peace offerings are next considered ^c : Easy both to read and understand. They were made either to supplicate for peace, or to return thanks, and allowed to be feasted upon. In certain agreeable cases, more than one day might be occupied ^d.

The sin-offerings described ^e were divers as occasions offered, and people's different ranks might require ^f. There was one, and but one annual, and peculiarly solemn ^g.

Trespass-offerings were to be made for wilful deliberate sins ^h, which it will be sufficient to read. That made by women, after in-lying, is styled their ritual purification ⁱ. An atonement too, which shews the equivocal sense of that word, where no divine law was broken.

XXXIII. DELICATE SOCIAL DUTIES.

Chap. xix. 13, &c. *Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him : the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.*

CERTAIN social duties occur so often, that on this very account, they are the more apt to be neglected. Divine goodness appears to have had a view to that, in our text, and what follows.

The wages of a hired servant are not, for any time, to be detained, without their own consent. The space, however short, may not seem so to him whose heart is set upon it. An individual, or family meal, may depend upon instant payment.

^a Consult Chap. ii. Num. xv. 4, &c. ^b Psal. c. 2. ^c Chap. iii. from the beginning. ^d Psal. cxvii. 12, &c. ^e Chap. iv. ^f Compare Chap. xvi. ^g See Exod. xxx. 10, &c. ^h Chap. vi. ⁱ Compare Luke ii. 22. Exod. xiii. 2, 12.

A cheerful hour after sore labour is specially recruiting ¹. Under one way of defrauding for a season, others may be comprehended, and those most obviously worse. A man's right and inclination together do powerfully operate in him ².

To curse the deaf ^c is dreadful; or in any way to molest them by speech. Nor then, nor ever after, may they have it in their power to be justified. Calumnies are not soon, nor sometimes easily expiscated. Their hurt is often instant and irremediable. What compassion do we not owe to the deaf! There are those figuratively deaf, who should not be hurt neither; as the ignorant and erroneous, both pitiable. So likewise are the absent, sick and infirm. What heats and rage, from a discovered injury!

How shocking too, if a stumbling block be deliberately put in the way of a blind person! It is nigh of kin, truly, to cursing the deaf; at once cowardly and cruel. The brave would sooner storm a battery. The simple should be instructed. To abuse and sport with them maliciously is diabolically cruel.

To be unrighteous in judgement ^d is, in effect, to fight with God's weapons against himself. Nor tears, nor threats, then ought to be regarded. Sentences now given will be reviewed. A firm judging mind argues true majesty, and best flows from a pious principle. The rich are able, and the poor must have defenders, as is the case in all countries of freedom ^e.

Tale-bearers are cruel pests to society ^f. They make a trade of injuring, and yet would seem by their officiousness, to act as friends. He buys his base wares in one circle, with avidity; to sell them with yet more mischief to a second. It is like his food, as it is that of those who welcome him. Both detestable! Say by your manner, that you have no room for such. They are blood-suckers: For what is character less than life ^g.

a Jam. v. 4. b Prov. iii. 27. c Verse 14. d Verse 15. d Jam. ii. 2, &c.
Exod xxxiii. 3. xviii. 13. e Verse 16. f Matth. v. 21, &c.

In just Jewish estimation ^a, not to do good is to hate; especially in respect of spiritual concerns. First take notice of evil in private. Be fair and calm; if need be, and for future safety, rebuke. Forgive, and be forgiven. Thus, at least, one delivers their own soul.

To avenge ^b or grudge, are both inimical to religious love. Deny no lawful kindness even to one who has injured. Rest not in a state of anger ^c. Promote the circulation of good will^d.

N U M B E R S.

XXXIV. A FORM OF BLESSING.

Chap. vi. 24. *The LORD bless thee, and keep thee.*

FROM the twentieth chapter of Leviticus, to the end of this book, such particulars, orders and laws, relative to the Jewish priesthood, are laid down, as may be read without a comment; and being little, if at all, more than has been taken notice of, alluded to in the New Testament, do so much the less interest us.

From the beginning of Numbers, to the passage read for a text, the people, by divine command, were enumerated; which gives title to the whole book. Being followed by another, when their travels came nigh to a conclusion ^e, it would seem that the space comprehended between the two, was in and about thirty-eight years.

The form of blessing, which the text contains, is a chief subject of attention that we meet with; to be made use of by Aaron and his sons, upon solemn religious occasions, and most fit to be understood.

To bless and keep is general; and expresses desire of good, as well as to be preserved from evil. Thus both may and

^a Verse 17. ^b Verse 18. ^c LXX. ^d See Jer. iii. 12. Psal. ciii. 9. Neh. i. 2. Rom. xiii. 12, &c. Deut. xxii. 26. Exod. xi. 2. Luke x. 27. Col. iii. 12, 13.

^e Chap. xxvi.

ought private friends to address one another. In the mouth of teachers to a congregation, they import large and extensive kindness^a. The gospel blessings are still more important^b.

The LORD make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee, is still more affecting: in allusion to the bright look of a friend, after long absence, or upon some remarkable event. How pleasing this, as coming from an infinitely munificent God^c! How wide and energetic is pious ardour thus expressed! Repentance, through a mediator, yields such blessed hope^d.

How gratifying all this, in solemn devotion! Beyond pardon reaches peace; even to all possible happiness, and for both worlds^e. To put GOD's name upon the objects of our peculiar tenderness, and more or less, is in the power of all who often, and uprightly pray. They do what they can, and heaven will be there, to make out the rest^f. They who instrumentally encourage the life of GOD in the human soul, do put his name in them! Blessed teachers! Blessed parents! Blessed friends^g!

XXXV. MOSES COMPLAINETH.

Chap. xi. 11. *And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?*

NO virtue, in this state of trial, can be brought to perfection. Moses, meek to a proverb, was overcome by the guilt of Israel. His language, even in the presence of GOD, had a mixture of wrath in it^h. They were somewhat impiously ungrateful.

a Compare Lev. ix. 22.--xxi. 5.
Ixxxix. 15. &c---xxxiv. 15.

b 1 Cor. x. 13.
d Psal. ciii. 9, &c.

c Psal. iv. 6---xi. ult.
e Rom. v. 1, &c.

Jo. xiv. 27---16. ult.

f Psal. lxxxiv. 17, &c.

Matth. vii. 11.

g Compare Jo. xvii. 3. 1 Pet. i. 15. Dan. xii. 3. Mal. iii. 16.

h Compare

Verse 7, with Verse 4, 5.

Divine displeasure was manifested against numbers of them, where guilt did most prevail. Then the survivors cried unto Moses for his intercession, as in time past, who did so, and the fire ceased. From burning, the place was named Taberah.

With the cessation of what did consume, still multitudes in Israel did murmur, even to approve. They spurn at the very idea of miraculous food. Hideous perversion ^a. No wonder the anger of the LORD, speaking after the manner of men, was kindled. Moses also was much displeased: Yet, though indignant, he should have been more calm. It is vexatious to peruse what follows, from verse 11th, and at the door of the tabernacle. Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant, &c.? Let moderation, under the prevalence of vice, speak as becometh the frailty of man. It is the servant's duty to bear, and to aim at public reformation. Moses had often found favour, and should not so hastily have complained. Here his prominent feature of devout meekness is marked with a blot. Did God lay all the burden upon him? Quite the reverse.

Passion begun, widens like the breaking out of waters. Am I bound to provide for them? Was to a certain degree impious. Have I begotten them? And so forth. Strange language, verily, because Israel did childishly, or rather wickedly weep. I have not wherewith to satisfy their clamour. By far too much is already said. If heavy, he was not alone.

Still he goes on; but it should be read by one's self, and be-moaned. To see wretchedness, is to be so; as to see death, is to die ^b. Let none of us, after his example, forget our obligation and place ^c. Still the pitying JEHOVAH sees him as frail, and not presumptuous ^d. Read and admire Divine condescension! Choose thee now joint advisers. Think here of Psal. lxxxiv. 11. Sincerity is what God ever did, and will reward. Moses had need of pardon, and did meet with it ^e. And I will come down, &c. Even henceforth visibly, thou shalt not be alone. Nor doth gracious heaven forget the murmurers themselves, even to the loathing of what they

^a Read from verse 10.

^b Psal. lxxxix. 48.

^c Jam. iii. 13.

^d Verse 16.

^e Verse 17, &c.

sought :

sought : An awful lesson to future ages, to be at once pious and prudent.

Religion itself doth not justify extreme anger ^a. In devout acts more especially the rule is ^b.

XXXVI. MIRIAM AND AARON.

Chap. xii. 6. *And he said, Hear now my words : If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.*

ENVY is the hateful disorder of repining at the good of another. Who can stand before it ? Yea, who can think of it without horror ? It is strictly diabolical ^c : Alas, after all, but too common ^d. Competition by parts, among men of science, not unseldom feel its power. Thus verse 1st of our chapter, and what follows, hath the LORD spoken by us, &c. Vanity, from outward circumstances, might be at bottom,

Both act as strangers to what the ALMIGHTY had often said and done. Their crime, otherwise, was variously enhanced, and did much displease the LORD. Moses stands aloof, without the smallest symptom of revenge ^e. An intercourse takes place from the emblematical pillar of divine presence, which explains his coming down. There is a quickness in the mode of speech, like that of anger towards the two offenders, to stifle insurrection with speed. A mobbish spirit suffers not to dally. The female appears to be first named, as chief aggressor.

Now that order is reversed, as Aaron should have known better. The Omniscient JEHOVAH assumes to himself the sole right of divine communications, in all their different forms. Herein he will be restricted by none ^f.

But as for Moses ^g, he is not spoken to as to others, in re-

^a Jam. i. 21. ^b 1 Tim. ii. 8. 1 Cor. v. Heb. xiii. 5. 1 Cor. x. 5, &c.

^c Jo. viii. 44. 1 Jo. iii. 12.

^d Jam. iv. 5.

^e Compare verse 3.

^f See 1 Sam. x. 5—xix. 24. Amos vii. 15.

^g Verse 7.

gard to his singular fidelity, even in the most difficult cases. His inspirations hitherto, and methods of acquiring them, have been superior to every other ^c. Easy and familiar like that of a friend: not by similitude, but direct.

Then did the LORD depart with the cloud itself, from off the tabernacle. Miriam, from this time became leprous, at once loathsome and infectious. She might now read her sin of vanity in the nature of her punishment. Aaron deprecated, by means of Moses, any further vengeance; here as often elsewhere signified by sin. His sister too is prayed for.

Moses, gentle as faithful, did so, and was graciously heard to the utmost, after seven days. Once more, how detestable is envy! How sweet and conciliating is meekness ^d! Let each be satisfied and useful in their own place. Prayer avail-eth much

XXXVII. THE SPIES, AND RETURNS MADE.

Chap. xiii. 30. *And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.*

BY an express order of GOD, Moses sent spies to view the land of Canaan, who brought very different and even opposite reports. Joshua and Caleb only did speak what was equally favourable and true. Specimens too they brought along with them.

The cowardly did aggravate every shadow of bad appearances, and represent the natives as quite gigantic, and are believed rather than the other.

Hence, Israel again are led to murmur in the ear of Aaron, but ultimately terminating against GOD ^e. Would to GOD we had died, and so forth. Wherefore hath the LORD thus brought us to fall by the sword? &c. Still, it were better for us to return. Hideous, detestable ingratitude! No wonder Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, at such baseness of

^c Verse 8.

^d Matth. v. 5.

^e See chap. xiv. from the beginning.
mind,

mind, verse 5th of last cited chapter, before all the congregation. Joshua and Caleb too rent their clothes in grief, denying, in strong terms, the falsehoods which they had heard. If the LORD delight in us as hitherto, he will bring us to possess this exceeding good land; a land superabounding with delicacies. Rebel not against the LORD, for the inhabitants are destined to be as bread for us, and so on. All along, the devoutly magnanimous hero!

Yet were the number of dastard infidels ready to stone them. No truth of words, no power of argument might well restrain them. At length the tremendous glory of the LORD appeared before them all. And as though disdaining to speak with them, he addresses Moses alone ^d: how long will this people provoke me? Read the sequel. All from want of consideration and faith. I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them; and I will make of thee, notwithstanding, a mightier nation than they.

The intercessions of that faithful, compassionating servant of GOD are still for them, and full of tenderness; free, it may be thought, but admirably suited to former privileges. God is pleased with like humble spiritual pleadings. Read the narrative for generous emotions. They express the feelings of nature, in the language of nature.

And the LORD GOD, encouraging such pure, pious, disinterested warmth, did pardon, yet with certification that they should not see, so as to enjoy the promised land. Caleb and Joshua are excepted, as followers of the Most High God fully.

When upon the very borders of enjoyment, some, through rashness, obstruct themselves, becoming impatient. All they had gained before is lost. There was much divine wisdom in sending forth faithful spies. The misreports of cowards endanger the best laid schemes, and bring the valiant into great hazards. Adding guilt to guilt is treasuring up wrath in proportion. Ingratitude is deadly ruinous in the end ^e.

^d Chap. xiv. from verse 11.

^e Psal. cxxii. 4, &c.

XXXVIII. CALEB AND JOSHUA.

Chap. xiv. 24. *But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went ; and his seed shall possess it.*

THE two persons here named were sent out, among others, to search into the land of Canaan, which, though not needed upon the part of the ALMIGHTY, was a wise natural mean for encouraging Israel. They gave a faithful account, in opposition to all the rest, who strove, as much as in them lay, to dispirit ^a.

Those murmurers were not to see, so as to enjoy the good land ; whereas Caleb and Joshua most certainly would, both personally, and in their seed, or offspring. Their virtues, upon the above occasion, did mark them for devout heroes. They had resolution to face a fierce mobbish multitude ^b. They lingered not in divine service, Let us go up at once and possess it. We are well able, through promised grace ^c. By the same goodness, we shall, in time coming be steadfast. Worthy of imitation still by every sincere Christian.

The spiritual application may be easily made out from other and more explicit scriptures. True courage of this sort rises with dangers ^d. Resolution, well principled, is invincible. They foresee hazards, and deliberately attack them ^e. Say to thy soul, O believer, what if called out to be a martyr ? An awful alternative ^f ! Whomsoever the LORD delights in must succeed. They agree in disposition and acting ^g. Follow the LORD, then, fully ^h. The relish of obedience grows with exercise ⁱ. An inviolable security to perseverance ^k. Best column of true majesty in man. The sum of devout moral excellence.

a Chap. xiv. 10.

b Chap. xiii. 30.

c Chap. xiv. 8.

d Rom. xii. 2. 2 Cor. xiii. 16. Acts xx. 24.

e Luke xiv. 31, &c.

f Compare Matth. v. 19. 2 Tim. ii. 5.

g Rom. viii. 32. Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

Matth. vii. 11. Heb. xiii. 5, 6. John x. 27, &c. h Rom. ii. 7. Rev. iii. 21.

i Prov. iv. 18.

k Rom. viii. 15, &c.

XXXIX. AMALEKITES PREVAIL.

Chap. xiv. 41. *And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.*

A Dreadful and clear distinctive judgement did bring the people of Israel, for a while to mourn. In this fit of repentance, they gat them up to fight without waiting for advice. Their rashness in one way is not unsimilar to the former, though out of a better motive. God, by his servant, ought first to have been consulted. Their zeal was an impulse of terror. They prescribed duties to themselves always unsafe, and to which no sure promises of aid are given.

Whence, they were smitten before their enemies. Instructive still, to the sorrowing penitent heart. There may be zeal from terror, more than from offence given. Such is that of most death-bed penitents. Dreadful, yet unavailing! Even whole nations too may be awakened to transient grief. The dread of either being over, they frequently wax worse and worse. Ingenuous remorse feels vice as horrible ^k. Let aggravations be dwelt upon.

They who wait not upon God make hazards, as well as improper duties for themselves. So Israel did unnecessarily alarm the Amalekites, both nigh to them and strong. They might have better been worn out by expectation, or a fitter place found. But grief, when poignant, thinks of nothing but immediate action. Calm advisers never court dangers. What had Peter to do with fighting? And why did he not abandon the place of hazard?

Moses forewarns these late murmurers, and now rash, that they would not prosper. The strength and number of enemies, whether spiritually or temporally understood, should be well weighed ^l. Be not high minded. Fits of ardour are seldom circumspect, or regularly devout ^m. Whatever be thy

^k Compare verse 11th of our chap.

^l Phil. ii. 14. Prov. xxviii. 13.

^m Compare verse 42d of our chapter.

fortitude, leave not the ark of God behind ^d. Retrograde motions at times are preferable to rash adventures. One great mind is of more account than a vociferous multitude. Audaciousness is not courage.

XL. PRESUMPTUOUS SINNING.

Chap. xv. 30. *But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, (whether he be born in the land, or a stranger,) the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people.*

SINS of ignorance at the time, the best are liable to, and are compassionate: whereas, if done with knowledge of their evil, require a peculiarly deep and solemn repentance. Certain presumptuous crimes were not to be forgiven by the law of Moses. It was sinning with a high hand. See the margin of our text; not only wilful, but audacious. Under a new and gracious covenant, even such ought not to be excluded from hope, if they amend.

All should think of this case as an extreme evil one. The nature of presumptuous sin is not difficult to apprehend. It argues thought and conviction before acting; as when children, when they have been rash, come to lie and prove obstinate. These, they themselves feel to be blameable; nor should they be spared. In more advanced life, how much more odious. In both cases, calm means of recovery ought first to be used. Stern looks and words may sadly affright. One sin against light makes way for another still worse ^e.

Hence, the hazardous nature of presumptuous sinning becomes manifest. It, in some sort, reproacheth the LORD, as unfit to command, or having no right. Though, in every view, we are not our own, but his. How impious ^f! Such, moreover, despise his word, at once so clear and authoritative, as arbitrary impositions ^g. Ungodly presumption!

^d See verse 25.

^e Psal. i. 1, 2.—xix. 13.

^f Isa. i. 3.

^g Compare Psal. xix. 7, &c. Mic. vi. 8.

Thus

Thus to persevere must be unpardonable! What restraints will they not break over, who can sin with so high a hand?

Think of divine Omniscience ^a. To this we can no where look, or hear, or move, without aids. Those of scripture are still more adapted to the bulk of mankind ^b. A sweet and grand preservative ^c! Prayer, from both, is at once easy and essential ^d. Such may be overtaken, but they can never offend presumptuously. On the other hand, see Heb. iii. 13.

XLI. KORAH AND ABIRAM REBEL

Chap. xvi. 3. *And they gathered themselves together against Moses, and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?*

A Desire of rule, when moderated, is not blameable; but requires much prudence of mind, and study to excel. If originating from pride, few vices are more pestive. Such was the case with Korah and Abiram. They combine against one whose mission had been proved undeniable. And the same way against Aaron, whom they knew to be chosen chief, as to ecclesiastical concerns, upon like clear evidence with their civil ruler.

They are rude from want of argument, and not the less agreeable to a mob. Read the narrative. Ye take too much upon you, and so forth. Wherefore then lift up yourselves? Such conduct is vain, presumptuous and arrogant.

No wonder that conscious innocence should suffer much, while he fell upon his face before God, and prayed for counsel and relief. The sequel clearly shews how his earnest mental devotion had been accepted. Even to-morrow the LORD GOD will evince who are his, and who is holy. Consider what follows. The matter after this will no more abide dubious. There he directs the congregation how to act,

^a Psal. xvi. 8.---lxxiii. 21, &c.

^b Heb. viii. 10.

^c Col. iii. 16.

^d 1 Peter ii. 1.

^d 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

which should be well attended to, and compared with their own language, verse 3d.

The whole transaction was to be open, plain, and fair ^a. Their irreligion and pride, at the same time, are mildly glanced at. Had Korah and his company stopped here, under conviction; much trouble, it may be, would have been prevented, but they had taken their measures, and would see them out, like most other incendiaries. Dathan and Abiram are likewise called to that court of judgement, who had not been less contemptuous, if not more. Read from the word. Indeed every shadow of evil they had magnified. We will not any longer come up to obey thee. Voluptuousness and pride are at the bottom. They trust in their multitudes, headed by princes: They would starve no longer. Sarcastically wicked and ungrateful.

Perhaps never was the love of change more causeless, or aggravated. Whence Moses, meek as he was, became very wroth. The tremendous issue must be read, when people are by themselves. Earth opens, and takes the chiefs down alive. Great numbers of the rest are consumed by fire from their own censers; afterwards beat to pieces, and collected together for holy use. The plague then is stayed, by the incense of Aaron, hereby establishing his dignity.

A seasonable warning in the second year of their sojourning, to future times.

Fear God, and honour the king. Meddle not with them that are given to change. Beware of whisperers, and they who make or magnify evil reports. Religious pretences are often the most popular and dangerous. Prudent watchfulness does great honour to rulers ^b. Suspend judgement in doubtful cases. Lean most to what is favourable to order and peace. Thank God for *British* good.

^a Verse viii. 9.

^b Compare Rom. xiii. 1, &c. 1 Pet. ii. 13.

XLII. AARON'S ROD BLOSSOMETH.

Chap. xvii. 5. *And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom; and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you.*

OF the tribe of Levi, devoted to the priesthood, the family of Aaron were to be the chief. For rebellion against this express divine order, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, did tremendously suffer, with a multitude of their accomplices.

To prevent any like disturbance, it pleased God ^a (Read what follows) to evince Aaron's right by the miracle of his rod, cut off from the same tree, blossoming in the tabernacle. JEHOVAH himself there did emblematically meet them. A curious passage, and to be attentively reflected upon. Aaron's rod next morning alone was budded, to the formation of fruit, in several of its parts. Being presented to the children of Israel, to their universal conviction, and afterwards laid up before the testimony ^b, by way of standing token: All which was executed by Moses. The late remaining murmurers humbled themselves, and did obtain forgiveness. Read this with due care. All together astonishing ^c! An undeniable evidence for the whole œconomy of Moses.

A transfer of the priesthood to CHRIST, in the tribe of Judah, in fulfilment of prophesy, became so much more remarkable; and with that, the desolation of Jerusalem.

It may be excusable, to apply the above spiritually; as first, that a choice now of the SUPREME BEING, as to his religious ministers, is best determined by inclination and abilities of such. This answers well to blossoms, buds, and nourishing fruits, like an impulse of heaven. The love of applause and filthy lucre have nothing to do here ^d. Literature, and

^a Verse 1.^b Verse 4, 7.^c See Heb. ix. 4, &c.^d 1 Pet. v. &c.

even genius, may become indolent, if not worse ; proud and domineering^a. Ministerial conduct ought to be at once sweet and beautiful^b.

XLIII. THE ROCK SMITTEN AT MERIBAH.

Chap. xx. 8. *Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes, and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock : So thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.*

THESE words refer to one of the most remarkable passages in Jewish history, bringing water out of the flinty rock ; where at once Divine condescension, and the vice of Israel, are made manifest.

When these last come to Zin, they chode Moses, with whom they should have calmly argued. In effect, they were impiously disrespectful to his sovereign constituent ; who, in cases of equal want, had miraculously supplied them^c. Would GOD we had died, and so forth. Wherefore have ye made us to come out of Egypt ? Dreadful slavish spirit ! Base obstinate ingratitude !

Under sore provocation and grief, Moses, with Aaron, carry the case to OMNIPOTENT LOVE, in devout prostration ; and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. They were appointed to speak but one plain word, and the power of heaven would be seen by all the people. A clear astonishing order ! And Moses irritated, smote the rock twice, as though himself had been prime in this particular. Harken ye rebels, must we fetch you water ? Alas, for this excess ! If the waters came not in abundance at first, true self command would have waited : Who can know his errors^d ? He is over-

a Compare 1 Tim. iii. 2---iv. 12, &c. Rom. ii. 17, &c. b Mal. ii. 6.
c Compare verse 3, 4. d Psal. xix. 13.

taken, and though punished in part afterwards, gracious allowance is made for him ^a.

To a certain degree, it was the waters of strife, as the word Meribah imports ^b. Then and still the great name of God doth appear, for the wilderness was extensive, and traces of the miracle do yet shew themselves to the attentive, both upon the rock and channels, or beds from it. Probably time itself will not erase these. Let God be sanctified ^c ! And own how rebellious Israel was. May their melancholy end prove a warning to every other ^d.

Even in a good cause zeal may be excessive ^e. A single clear word, in the name of God, will operate more than bitter wrath, to advantage. Doubts in the best will sometimes mix with faith. Hearken not to them. GOD in CHRIST knows how to bear with human imperfection ^f.

XLIV. EDMITES WANTING IN CIVILITY.

Chap. xx. 18. *And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword.*

THE Edomites were descended from Esau, and a fierce people. Want of friendship for others around them still continues to be their character, as anciently foretold. Though allied to the children of Israel by a common father, Isaac ; they pay no regard to a civil message sent them. Read the narrative, from verse 17. Said their chief, thou shalt not pass by me, &c. but at the risk of death to each of you. If understood to be political, it was far from affectionate, or even natural. Still hoping for success, the children of Israel send a new embassy ^g. They would pay damages to the full, and on demand ; nor would they linger. A yet more peremptory refusal is made than before ^h. Their words are short and angry, and their warlike appearances answer to them.

a Psal. cvi. from verse 32.

b Verse 13.

c See Chap. xvii. 10.

d Rom. xi. 21.

e Jam. i. 21.—iii. 13, &c.

f Compare 1 Cor. x 1, &c.

g Verse xix.

h Verse 20.

For peace and good example's sake, the children of Jacob turn away to a different road from Kadish, to the mount of Hor.

Savage rusticity admits of no excuse: Small companies passing at a time could have done no hurt, in midst of a great majority. War, notwithstanding, is a serious affair, and never rashly to be engaged in. Yield somewhat, rather than shed blood. Upon the whole, a difficult moral subject. Facility and stiffness are to be guarded against with care. Regulations that will extend to individuals ^a. At Mount Hor, they were to be deprived of Aaron ^b.

Eleazar, by express command, was to succeed ^c. Moses obeys, and Aaron was buried. Wonderful composure! Age and good hope together might well support. Great is the power of religion, and an interest in a forgiving God. Brotherly love had not long to endure. The congregation decently bewail their loss for thirty days. The tendernesses of nature for a time require such modes. Yet is moderation commendable. Much praise is due to ALMIGHTY Love for a quiet and easy dissolution. A good life, upon the whole, is the best preparative.

Humbling deficiencies should lead to mourn, and trust to GOD in CHRIST ^d.

XLV. ISRAEL MURMURS AT HORMAIL.

Chap. xxi. 5. *And the people spake against GOD, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread.*

AFTER the death of Aaron, the children of Israel chode Moses again, in terms of ungrateful virulence, no less than impious. A new and long circuit about Edom, they were averse to. Their plenty of food and water seems to

^a 1 Cor. vi. 1, &c. Compare Deut. ii. 5, 6. Josh. xi. 17. ^b Verse 26.
and compare Verse 12. ^c Chap. xxxiii. 38. Deut. x. 6.

^d Think of Psal. xxiii. throughout.

have made them factious. Wherefore have ye brought us out of Egypt? And so forth.

Read the whole ^a at large, and see how peevish they are: More like children than men. They murmur in midst of plenty, and are bit by fiery serpents: A sore, but just plague. Thirst and death did ensue for some space ^b.

Every open part of the body was liable to be bit by those flying poisonous serpents. Yet mercy with God rejoices over judgement. Read from verse 7th. Ingenuous and particular confession of guilt does, for most part, issue in amendment ^b. How accurate is Moses, and how charitable in his temper! The serpent was like one, from similarity of effects. How efficacious is fervent prayer ^c. Read the LORD's answer. Faith in divine mercy, fitly succeeds to amendment ^d. A mere look of faith will not do, without firm purpose of and endeavour after new obedience. To trust, and yet transgress, is to insult ^e. Let not the worst, if sincere, be discouraged; nor any one presume ^f. The true doctrine of salvation, is of easy apprehension ^g.

XLVI. BALAK AND BALAAM.

Chap. xxii. 5. *He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: Behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.*

AFTER the conquest of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, Israel became possessed of the plain of Moab, on the east side of Jordan, by Jericho: All briefly narrated Chap. xxi.

Hence Balak, king of Moab, took the alarm, and sent to Balaam, son of Peor, for counsel and aid: A passage of considerable difficulties, and yet instructive. Upon which, it

^a Compare IIa. xxx. 6. Wisdom of Solomon, Chap. xvi. 1, 5 1 Cor. x. 9.
^b Compare Exod. viii. 6. Deut. viii. 15. ^c Verse 8. ^d Compare Jo. iii. 14, &c. Lu. xxiv. 47. ^e Acts iii. 19.---xx. 20. Lu. xiii. 3, 5. Rom. viii. 33.---v. 1. ^f Rom. vi. 1, &c. ^g Heb. viii. 10. Psal. lxxxix. 15, &c. Matth. xi. 28. Isa. lv. 4, 7, &c. Jo. xii. 32. Heb. ii. 14, 15.

may be observed, that Balak, son of Zippor, hearing how nigh Israel had pitched their tents to him, after late and great successes, he became deadly afraid, because of their multitudes, and did apply to the elders, or princes of Midian, to be his confederates. He likewise conceives the design of obtaining supernatural help, by means of Balaam, reputable for divine powers, agreeable to the superstition of those places and times.

As having interest with a local Deity, he supposed him capable of obtaining from him either a blessing or curse; and sent unto him for the last against Israel, and from their own God, that they might not have it in their power to molest Canaan, and the neighbourhood. How grossly ignorant! His messengers arrive at Pithor, where Balaam dwelt, a little west of the two famous rivers Tigris and Euphrates, whence Abraham had been called, and left some traces of divine truth. To the belief of One True God we may suppose Balaam to have been educated, and at times to have had special gracious revelations, which were then known; and which led to Balak's impious device, to purchase a curse from above with money.

The prophet by this time may have dealt in base lucrative schemes, or been so represented to the king, who said, by his servants, Come, in the name of thy God, and curse me this people. Read the whole. A motion to be abhorred, had not Balaam at heart become corrupt. At the sight of a high reward held out to him; he desires the messengers to lodge there that night, in place of instantly dismissing them. This itself was half a conquest^a. He is now a diviner, and no prophet^b. Thus evil men and seducers wax worse and worse: Instructive to every age.

What relates after this, to the ass and angel, one of the most learned Jews understands to have passed in vision; nor does this make any material difference with respect to the character, being in many cases equal to facts. So some explain the temptations of our blessed LORD^c. More certainly

^a Josh. xiii. 22. ^b Num. xxiv. 20. Neh. xiii. 2. Read both with care, and
^c Mic. vi. 5. 2 Pet. ii. 15. Jude xi. c Matth. iv. 1, &c.

still

still, Cornelius the centurion ; St. Peter and St. Paul's exstacies. This greatly purges our subject of what is difficult.

Let us abhor covetousness, as the idolatrous root of all evil. Even real prophets, at times, may thereby become vicious^a. Think of wretched Judas here. 'To transgress in heart is justly punishable^b. Balaam grudges that he could not have leave to curse^c. Fly temptation^d. Then follows the astonishing vision, to be read. Rage and covetousness do often go together^e.

XLVII. BALAK SACRIFICES.

Chap. xxiii. 4. *And GOD met Balaam : And he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram.*

BALAM, in opposition to some early good principles, sinks at heart into the world. He would, after all that had happened, make a second attempt to gratify the ignorant superstitious Balak^f. Seven, with the Jews, was a favourite or perfect number. The princes themselves became chiefs in this pompous worship, as priests like Melchizedek, by their regal office. Burnt-offerings were the most solemn of every other, and to be quite consumed.

A high place, in our translation, signifies likewise one that is solitary. See the margin. Here he is spoken to, by a messenger from above ; in great condescension to an infant state of human understanding. The knowledge of such a transaction would soon, and widely diffuse itself, so as to facilitate much the conquest of Canaan. A circumstance of great account in this whole matter. Read the following speech of Balaam with care, verse 5, &c.

The prophet's parable appears to have been instantly suggested. Though veiled in part, it is clear in points of great moment. I now see in my mind Israel ready to trample

a Matth. vii. 22 b Jam. i. 14, 15. c Verse 13, of our chapter. Comp. 2 Pet. ii. 20. d Verse 15, 18. e Ver. 31. Psal. xxxii. 9, &c. f Ver. 1, &c.

Baal, put for all the other heathen gods, as under his feet ^a : Lo, there, in the lofty lands of Canaan, shall Israel dwell alone. Who can count the dust of Jacob? And so on ^b.

Let me die the death of righteous Israel, now emancipated from the grossness of idolatry, and let my last end be like his. Its best sense for certain is, to pass from this into a better world. Others say, in my posterity, or descent.

Balak's reply was very suitable to a barbarous unenlightened mind, and should be attentively read. To which Balaam, bad as he had been, makes a suitable reply, and most instructive to think upon. A change of place, quantity and quality of sacrifices, make no change in God ^c. Once more superstitious follies are repeated, and Balaam gives them countenance. Let us wonder at, and deplore the ignorance of ancient heathenism, then look to the gospel and say, as in Psalms lxxxix. 15, &c. ^d

XLVIII. ANSWER TO BALAK A SECOND TIME.

Chap. xxiii. 19. *GOD is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good.*

THOUGH Balaam was more enlightened than most around him, yet, for filthy lucre, he did abandon the proper use of his religious principles ^e. Whence he stands upon record, as a base apostate.

His covetousness, at the same time, is overruled, for making the one only God better known. Considering the rank of those immediately employed, this, both far and wide, must have been the effect. Local deities till now was a general error. Balaam was next to have words of great import put into his mouth, of terror to Balak but encouragement to Israel.

^a Compare chap. xxii. 41.

^b See Gen. xiii. 16.---xxviii. 14,

^c Compare verse 13.

^d Psal. lxxxix. 15, &c. Eph i. 3, &c.---iii. 14, &c

Heb. xiii. 5. Psal. l. 2, &c.

^e 2 Thess. ii. 10.

The Mount now fixed upon was Pisgah, where again altars were erected, with a suitable provision of sacrifices, to engage the god of the hills. Just as inauspicious as the former valley ones. The mind of heaven is thus sublimely and parabolically uttered, verse 18, &c. peruse them at leisure. Hear, Balak, and so on. Our God is of one mind, and who can turn him? In promises and threatenings unconditional, he is still the same ^d. In our chapter we meet with agreeable poetical repetitions, and the history of Israel is concise to a wonder. The images are strong.

Consider well verse 23d, &c. No art against him can be successful. What hath he not done, to own and preserve his people! Thus far Balaam, and allowing for poetical prophecy, the instant accomplishment in Canaan, was marvellous. No wonder that Balak was brought low; come, neither curse them at all, nor bless them. Do but keep off your Deity, and let us alone to ourselves. Words of displeasure, in part, and to which Balaam makes a proper return. 'Told not I thee, at our out-set, all that the LORD God of Israel speaketh, and so forth. Read with care.

The King, resuming a more placid air, still insists with heightened promises, come, I pray thee, &c. and still the wages of iniquity prevail at heart; for the mad prophet allows himself to be brought to the top of Peor, the highest probably in Moab, and where was an idolatrous Temple, named Baal-peor. Here he would even conciliate, if possible, the true God, by a temporizing worship.

Balaam consents to try the issue. Meanwhile, what a melancholy state is that of an unenlightened mind! At one time in terror, at another, hideously cruel^e. What thousands every day do perish by the side of Ganges! Wives consumed alive with their dead husbands; subjects with sovereigns ^f.

^d Rom. xi. 35.

^e Micah vi. 6, &c.

^f Compare Luke i. 76, &c.

Psal. lxxii. ult.

XLIX. BALAAM LEAVETH DIVINATIONS.

Chap. xxiv. 1. *And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face towards the wilderness.*

THOUGH Balaam believed in one Supreme God, yet this seems to have been mixed with a variety of pagan errors: as for example, that he could be prevailed upon to bless and curse after an arbitrary manner, of which the foregoing history affords a clear evidence.

He makes a third and last attempt of the above sort, in what follows, and which may now be read with care. He does not, indeed, say as formerly to the king, stand by and I will go hence, for consulting Israel's LORD. And when he did return, it was under very different inspirations from what he did wish. He set his face toward that wilderness, where that people were, and predicts very wonderful things concerning them, in a way of parable, not difficult to explain. Let, therefore, the passage be attentively read. How goodly are thy tents, O ye descendants of Jacob? and so on. The repetitions are elegant. As the rich verdant valleys are they spread forth. Not only pleasant, but fruitful. His king shall be higher than Agag, the Boast of Amalek, and put, it would seem, for every other. Applied even by many Jewish interpreters, to the MESSIAH. See the Greek translation §.

From verse 8th of Balaam's parable, we read, God hath brought forth him, that is Jacob, in his posterity, out of Egypt, &c. Invincible as an unicorn, and awful besides, like a lion. Who, without suffering for it, shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee. Thus ends the parable of Balaam, and much to the disappointment of Balak, whose anger therefore was kindled against the prophet. In rage he smote his hands, &c. Balaam's defence was most just, and should be well attended to. I cannot, of my own mind, the substance thereof, do either good or bad. Excellently well! and yet not followed out as it should have been,

but far otherwise. Read and be astonished. It shews how very bad men in the main may be used by providence for wise and beneficial ends. Compare with the visions gone through^h, when doubled, they denote both certainty and moment. So when subjects of high spiritual nature haunt the mind, it is like a call from above to advert to them. Quench not the spirit. Abhor and fly from all pretences to divination, as pensive to society, and sound judgement. Order is at once beautiful and strengtheningⁱ. Plain scripture words are more than all visions^k.

L. BALAAM PROPHESIETH.

Chap. xxiv. 15. *And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said, &c.*

BALAM was covetous, and yet made use of, by the ALMIGHTY as an instrument, to affect the eastern world with the belief of one only living and true God, and not unlikely that of a MESSIAH too.

Balaam's eyes were open at the time of the vision, whence words from the Omniscient JEHOVAH did come. It seems to have been such a trance as that of St. Paul's^l. I shall, or do see him, according to some, but not now to take place, repeated again. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre, or prince of high dominion; and shall smite the corners of Moab, or chiefs^m. Applied by most ancient Jewish writers to the CHRIST. From matters high and clear, the prophets made use of language frequently more applicable to distinct and greater things. In the days of Trajan, a noted impostor, Bar-chobas, did apply this prediction to himself, an evidence of what many Jews did supposeⁿ. Then there prevailed an opinion over all the East, say Tacitus and Sueton,

^h Chap. xxii. 5.

ⁱ Verse 9th.

^k 1 Cor. xii. 28, &c.--xiii.

^l 2 Cor. xii. 1, &c. Compare verse 3, 4, of our chapter. ^m See Psal. cx. 1, 2.

ⁿ Compare Matth. ii. throughout.

two heathen historians, of a great governor to arise, or set forth by divine oracles.

In part, Moab was smitten by king David, 2 Samuel 8th, but not to the full °.

The children of Seth, no less than those of Moab, were of great account at this time. All, in the end to be brought under one mild Governor, Nay even Edom, or the descendants of Esau at length. Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion without any parallel p. A special part of Balaam's prophecy reaches to Amalek q, one of the earliest opposers of Israel r.

What belongs to the Kenites is tremendous, by nature strong, and yet to be destroyed. Read the narrative, fulfilled 2 Kings xvi. 9, &c. Alas, alas, adds the prophet, who shall live when God doth all this! A rest and sigh, after such a vision of blood, would not be unnatural. Greeks and Romans, signified by Ships of Chittim, shall afflict Eber, or the Jews. So did Alexander, Vespasian, and Titus; and now, how dispersed is their state? We owe them pity, after all their crimes. So King and prophet did part. To the belief of scripture, the above passage is a great support.

LI. PHINEHAS.

Chap. xxv. 12. *Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace.*

SENSUAL vices are sadly progressive, and to be abhorred r. The children of Israel were often melancholy examples. Having conquered by miracle, the Amorites, and certain of the Moabites, they became idolaters, by means of their females. Read the passage itself. A guilt most shockingly aggravated, and which met with vengeance, like that from kindled anger among men.

Their heads, or principal persons, were to be hung up, or accursed, for a warning to the rest, after being put to death.

o Compare Psal. lx. 8 --- cviii. 9. r Cor. xv. 26.

p Psal. lxxii. 8.

q Verse 20. r Compare Exod. xvii. s 1 Sam. xv. 3.

s 1 Peter ii. 11.

One audacious man, from rank or opulence, or both, defied all Israel, and Moses himself. Too much to be borne, by a noble patriotic Phinehas, who, being son of Eleazar, the high priest, took a javelin in his hand, and stabbed both the offenders. So the plague was stayed after a consumption of no less than twenty and four thousand. It was zeal worthy of one so nearly allied to God ^a. Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace; comprehending all manner of good ^b, while the Jewish state should exist, signified by everlasting. His heroic act was like an atonement for Israel, or graciously accepted.

When jealousy, as in verse 11th, is ascribed to an Infinite, and Infallible God, it denotes no more than sensibility to his honour, in the way of keeping his worship pure and entire. Zeal, upon our part, from just principles ^c, is inseparable from love ^d. Indignation at vice doth pity the criminal ^e. Let Zimri and Cosbi be at no time mentioned without horror, and may there never be wanting a Phinehas to correct such ^f.

LII. JOSHUA SUCCEEDS TO MOSES.

Chap. xxvii. 16. *Let the LORD, the GOD of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation.*

AFTER a new certification given to Moses, that none of the generation whom he had brought out of Egypt, save Caleb and Joshua, should enter into the promised land, that faithful servant, upon the whole, had a command to proceed no further than Mount Nebo, whence he was to see Canaan, and there to die, or to be gathered to his pious fathers. See the reason for this last at large, chapter xx.

Without complaining, he begs of the LORD to have a successor named, with suitable authority and wisdom. A noble example of generous patriotism, at a time when he was yet,

^a Verse 10.

^b Verse 13.

^c Verse 12.

^d Psal. xv. 4. —

xxvi. 4. 5. — cxxxix. 21, 22.

^e Mark iii. 6. James i. 24. —

iii. 13, &c. Isa. xlii. 4.

^f Psal. xii. ult.

though well advanced as to age, in full possession of all his faculties. His arguments for composure of mind should be often thought of: as, that the LORD JEHOVAH is Supreme. With him it is to will when, or how we shall die. Such, likewise, is that of the truly good. Their conviction is, that he cannot err; that what is best with him must be best for them. Thus they walk by faith, saying, in effect, LORD we are thine. Moreover, thou art Omnipotent; who can stand before thee, as an opposer? Hath not the potter power over the clay; much more over us the GOD of infinite majesty and love. Determine as seemeth good unto thee. This must be the happiness of all thine intelligent offspring.

But the grand consolation is still behind, that he who gave unto man flesh, or body, will also give to them spirit: a power to exist hereafter. And thus, exercising his intelligence properly, he is but a little lower than the angels. Death to such will constitute a nigher likeness still ^a. The more we know and the better we are, our progression in the scale of existence will be higher. Such an immortal and universal desire is as the voice of GOD in man to its truth. Affections of that sort could never be made in vain. Omnipotent love will never disappoint them ^b. The GOD of the spirits of all flesh will answer to each of their judicious cravings ^c. He is not the GOD of the dead, but of the living ^d. It is the very sum of the gospel record ^e.

Moses, like others of us, was not without blame, but he was upright, and salvable through grace ^f. Hence, with the utmost placidity, he went up to die. How worthy upon the whole to be imitated. People in office, and about to end their life, should take concern as to how they may be succeeded.

^a Heb. xii. 22.

^b Think of Isa. xlix. 15.

^c Compare again Matth. vii. 11. Heb. xi. throughout.

^d Verse 13.

Psal. xvii. 13.

^e 1 John v. 10, 11. 2 Tim. i. 10. 1 Thess. iv. 13, &c.

2 Cor. vi. 1, &c. John xiv. 2, &c. 1 Peter i. 3. ^f Verse 12, and 13. of our chap.

LIII. JOSHUA APPOINTED AND CHARGED.

Chap. xxvii. 18, 19. *And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him; and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight.*

AT the desire of Moses, Joshua the son of Nun is named as his successor ^a. His character, and the form of admission should be next attended to, by a careful perusal of the narrative. Take thee, and so forth ^b. The spirit of courage, and a sound mind, he did certainly possess, and, it may be at times, supernatural influence. His foresight, upon many occasions, was singularly striking. A part of the honour which belonged to Moses, as both leader and lawgiver.

Fortitude in rule is more or less essential, in opposition to partiality and fear. Even in families the former of these may be highly prejudicial. Much more in superior teaching and judicial trusts. Threats and rash defiances should be despised ^c.

The spirit of wisdom or prudence is likewise a noble quality in ruling ^d. So all inferiors ought calmly to be dealt with. The cruelties of rash command are often shocking. Justice and equality require thought ^e.

Devotion will be in much stead to both courage and prudence, or a prevalent fear of the Most High God. Moses and Joshua were great examples in this way ^f. Happy superiors! and happy people under them! Prophetical gifts are not to be looked for, but in difficult cases. God should be peculiarly owned with calm exercise of best powers, in those who rule. A cool spirit, among the Hebrews, did signify an excellent one, as in the case of Daniel ^g. Words of the wise and experienced have a claim to much notice.

^a Verse 16, 17.

^b Compare Exod. xxiv. 13.

^c 2 Cor. xiii. 16.

^d See 1 Peter iii. 7.

^e Isa. lii. 13.—xlii. 3, 4.

^f Compare Psal. ci. 1, 2.

^g 2 Sam. xxiii. 1, &c.

^g Compare Eccl. ix. 13, &c.

Civil power, conjoined with that which is modestly ecclesiastical, are of much public service ^a. Mere political alliances of the above sort, are often highly injurious.

LIV. VOWS.

Chap. xxx. 2. *If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond ; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth.*

BESIDES other sacrifices among the Jews, there were those of free-will, and these often accompanied with vows ^b. The last required frequently much labour to fulfil, as well as expence. Parents and other near relatives, as may be seen from perusing this whole chapter, were to be consulted.

Being made in times of difficulty or want, the ardours of youth might exceed, and the same way in thanksgiving ^c.

In treating this subject Christianly, we may observe, that vows ought to be lawful, for as much as no engagement against the will of GOD ought to be understood as binding. If the case of Jephtha ^d is literally explained, we may pronounce it to have been rash and cruel ; therefore not to be fulfilled. What right had he to bind himself ? The animal might have been unclean, therefore impious to offer ; or an innocent affectionate person, and therefore unnatural. After another fashion than dying, the best might be devoted. Such a record discourages all rash vows. Hannah's vow under great energies was much more commendable ^e. Read it with attention. Of a very opposite nature was the wicked vow of Herod. He had no right either to the half of his kingdom, or the head of John Baptist. He affects to scruple, and yet did not for either incestuous adultery or murder !

Vows, and swearing ones in particular, ought to be very deliberate ; yea and clearly conducive to pious and moral

^a 1 Tim. ii. 1, &c.
from verse 21.

^b See Lev. xxiii. 38.

^d Judges xi. 30, &c.

^c Compare Deut. xxiii.

^e 1 Sam. iv. 17.

improvement.

Improvement *. Personal devotedness to divine service is the chief free-will offering that any one can make, as renewing baptismal obligations at the LORD's table ^b.

This is the very soul of communicating. Happy, thrice happy bond ! Deliberate, persevering backsliders are not only wicked, but impious ^c. To encourage fidelity, think of 2 Peter i. 4. 1 John iii. 2. Psalm xvii. 15.

LV. MANSLAUGHTER AND MURDER.

Chap. xxxv. 11. *Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you ; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.*

FROM the frequent mutual intercourses of mankind, it may be expected, that certain accidents will arise which seem to us fortuitous, and which might never be done with design. At the same time, as they are awful divine permissions, and often from haste, they were, in some degree, made liable, under the law of Moses, to suffering from others. Whilst compassion, upon the whole, was due to the undesigning instrument, he had to fly to one of six cities of refuge, to be secure from vengeance, till a proper court of inquiry should settle, whether it was pitiable manslaughter, or murder.

A wise provision against the immediate impulses of grief, among friends of the deceased. If the man-slayer did not design evil, he might have been unwary, and this itself would provoke. The trouble and danger of flight was to be their punishment.

Considering the narrowness of the Jewish country, so many cities could not be widely distant from each other. In lands of immediate access to fair trial by law, such an appointment is not needful. Read the scripture narrative here, from verse 23d, in the case of throwing a stone, not to kill, but in too great a hurry. His life is safe, but not without some warning to others. A sufficient time is allowed for the anger of near

a See Psal. l. 23. — cxvi. 17, &c. — cxviii. 17.

b Compare 1 Cor. xv. 58. Tit. ii. 11, &c.

c Heb. x. 29, &c.

connections to subside, and perhaps even to look upon the misfortunate man with compassion. Other examples are to be met with, in different parts of the Old Testament.

The just severity of law against designed murder will not dispute. Read here from verse 16 of our chapter : All to be minutely inquired after, by legal judges, with a suitable number of witnesses. No satisfaction was to be taken for this crime, for as much as blood defileth the land. It is not only cruel, but an invasion upon divine prerogative. No such other high injury can be committed against man. It admits of no adequate compensation, and is quite pestive to the social peace. What a hideous assemblage of aggravation ! Even real acceptable penitence must be deep and solemn. If the murdered person has been good, he is bereft of all opportunity in this world, for becoming better, and of rendering others like himself so. He who foresees may make up for that, but no other can.

If the person slain was wicked, here every thing that is calamitous presents itself, and more than words can describe ^a. Other losses may be repaired, but not this. Millions of millions cannot restore him. Dismal enhancement ! Laws and penalties against murder overlooked would ruin society. Better not live at all, than live among such ^b. The greater crimes are, the more evidence they should have. One witness may be mistaken or partial.

LVI. JEWISH INHERITANCES.

Chap. xxxvi. 4. *And when the jubilee of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put into the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received : So shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.*

SEVERAL scripture passages depend upon the right understanding of this. By divine order, the land of Ca-

^a Think of Luke xii. 47.

^b Verse 30, 32.

naam was to be set off in lots, according to the number of tribes and families in them; which, before the death of Moses, was exactly taken. These portions were to be kept unalienable, unless it were from necessity, and that for a time. At each jubilee year possessions were to return.

Hence, each tribe and family were kept distinct, agreeable to their register of births and deaths. The lines of Judah, and David, were thus perfectly known; to fulfil Gen. xlix. 10. Observe how the year of jubilee is explained, verse 6, to keep inheritances separate. Each to marry in their own tribe^a. One year in fifty was to be the grand jubilee, in which liberty throughout all the land was to be proclaimed by sound of trumpet; every man to return to his own possession. All to prevent transference of property from one tribe to another. The trumpets made use of upon that occasion were rams' horns, which in the Hebrew are termed jubilan.

From the whole, it was easy to trace the pedigree of our Blessed LORD, and so explain the beautiful argument^b. Read the same with attention. Again, the different accounts given by Matthew and Luke as to the pedigree, or generation of our Divine Master, may be thus easily reconciled, where they seem to differ; by one tracing this through the line of Joseph, and the other that of Mary. They meet in the same tribe and family, agreeable to Luke ii. 4.

From the dispersed state of the Jewish nation since the rejection of CHRIST, they have no inheritances as above; and furnish a reasonable proof for the LORD JESUS, as true Messiah^c. How should they now, so widely scattered, retain their tables of pedigree, their several tribes and boundaries? All is at an end. Jerusalem is trodden under foot. No temple, or sacrifices. A moving argument. What witnesses are they for both Testaments^d.

a Compare Lev. xxv. from verse 8. b Heb. vii. 11, &c. c Compare at leisure Acts iii. 23, &c. d Ponder Rom. xi. nearly throughout. Luke ii. 10. Matth. vi. 9.

DEUTERONOMY.

LVII. MOSES PRAYS, AND IS NOT ACCEPTED.

Chap. iii. 23. *And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O LORD GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: For what god is there in heaven or in earth that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might?*

FROM the beginning of this sacred book, to the text, is little more than a brief rehearsal at the end of forty years sojourning, with an account of the divine displeasure against Israel.

Chapter third enters upon a new history; the conquest of Og, king of Bashan. Without any offence given, he comes out to war with the people of God, at Edrei: And the LORD said unto Moses, fear him not, &c. Read the rest. Accordingly they are smote, till few or none remained; and their cities, to the number of threescore, are taken, though most of them strongly fenced. So did the people of Bashan suffer, and became a spoil to Israel. The descendants of Reuben, and Gad, with the half tribe of Manasseh, have, for wise reasons, that country divided among them. Such of them as were meet for war are ordered out to pass the river Jordan armed, till the same Great LORD had done for the rest, as he had done for them.

Next, he renews his orders, to quit himself with like zeal, as he had hitherto seen exemplified, with assurance of remarkable success. Whether Moses became peculiarly enamoured of the fine plains and river, may not be certain; for his eyes, though

though old, were not dim, nor his strength abated ; but the fact is, that he did pray, and was refused. Read from these affecting words, Thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, O LORD ; and so on. I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land. But the LORD having had just cause, at one time, for displeasure sees fit to deny him : Let it suffice thee, speak no more of this matter, get thee up to the top of Pisgah, and see from all quarters thence, what thou hast forfeited. That honour, of possessing Canaan, is to be led on to by Joshua, whom I enjoin thee to charge and strengthen.

Observe here, how even real saints may suffer in their temporal concerns, by a single rash step, from loss of temper. Again, that prayers, limited to things of time, ought ever to be made with due submission. That when God calls upon any of them to die, they are not to look back upon what they must leave behind, but impress it upon survivors to follow out the purposes of Providence and grace, to the very utmost. What a fine instructive passage, taking all together !

Causes and effects are closs conjoined, and not in many instances to be separated without a miracle. He that toucheth pitch, must be defiled therewith : Behold, how great a matter a small fire kindleth ! Life and death are sometimes in the power of the tongue : Coals in one's bosom must burn. Moses at Meribah did but smite twice, and arrogate a little. Even a temporary forgetfulness of God may produce much mischief.

When we pray for things of time, let this be at heart, if God will, else we may ask amiss. Daily bread, or from day to day, seems to exclude delicacies. Think of Agur's prayer ^a. Rachel did die, in giving life. Let God be judge. Having our call to die, we should keep heaven in view. An everlasting Canaan is the portion of the good. Long speeches at dying time may not be in our power ; but hints will affect both long and much. Pious biography is useful reading. Widely different is superstitious rhapsodism.

^a Prov. xxx.

LVIII. NATIONAL GREATNESS.

Chap. iv. 8. *And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgements so righteous, as all this law which I set before you this day.*

TO die with ease, Moses renews his charge upon the children of Israel to obey. His words, being earnest, are many of them to one purpose, and will suit the heart of patriotism in every age. How apposite to an united kingdom like ours.

Taking national duties in the order of our context, the Israelites are required, verse 1, to hearken to the statutes and judgements which they were to be taught; that is relative both to divine worship, and what they owed to one another. The former claiming a manifest priority, as unto the parent of parents, and also leading to every thing good ^a.

The above duties were neither to be added unto, nor diminished, as if God himself knew not what was most reasonable ^b. A crime of great magnitude. It may be of good use to look back upon by-past public miseries, from disobedience; as in the case of Baal-peor. How prosperous on the other hand, steadfast public virtue has been. What an increase both of religious and civil advantages.

All the above should be taught to children, verse 9. How far superior a covenant of grace, to that of the Jewish temporal one? The LORD's Day, baptism, and a holy communion, are of infinite service.

Obedience is the sure life, health, preservation, and happiness of a kingdom. The more God has done for people, the more practically grateful should they be ^c.

^a Mal. iv. 6. Eccl. xii. 13.

^b Compare 2 Thess. ii. 1, &c.

^c Think of Matth. v. 17. Heb. viii. 10. Isa. ix. throughout. Jo. iv. 23, 24, with verse 7, of our Chapter.

LIX. ALMS.

Chap. xv. 7, &c. *If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates, in thy land which the LORD thy GOD giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother.*

THESE words, with some allowance for what was peculiar to the Jews, must move every tender heart; and should be often read, in all their parts. The occasions of want might be various then, as in every age. They need not to be enumerated. Even deficiency in former strict œconomy doth not excuse from alms. Bowels of natural compassion will move, and should be attended to. The covetous harden themselves in different ways, but none of them excusable. Compassion is the very soul of alms-giving. Did I not weep for him that was in trouble? The nigher to us in place and knowledge of circumstances, the more at heart should we grieve for them. Foreigners, if possible, should be attested.

The hand which ought to communicate must not be shut; but held out with pleasant relief. No delays, if it is not to borrow for them.

Open thine hand wide unto him. Let not the quantity be less than it appears. All pure feelings by exercise increase desire. To power, and sometimes beyond power, will true liberality abound. A frugal and industrious person will not suffer from this. Nice calculation is not often needed.

To lend without interest is better than alms, in many cases, but requires prudent managing. This is widely different from borrowing to trade with. Allowable interest is to be regulated by law. Lay not thyself under such obligation to the wicked, who may exact improper returns, verse 6. It is better to be pinched in body than mind. Gratitude is a meet return, but not vice. Punctually repay, and suffer not the generous lender to complain, or to suffer the pain of seeking back.

See for explication of the year of release ^a. It was something like a poor-stent, or tax. A cry of necessity is like that of prayer ^b. What is lent as to God he can never forget. The wise liberal almoner is seldom reduced. In his children such an one doth prosper ^c. All but as an earnest ^d. It is joyful to think the poor shall never cease ^e. Times of great scarcity have a special claim to alms. Where the able are unwilling, a tax must have place.

LX. JUDGES AND JUSTICE.

Chap. xvi. 18. *Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy GOD giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgement.*

PUBLIC happiness depends much upon the nature of civil government ^f. A wise counsel, and afterwards confirmed by the ALMIGHTY.

Being now upon the borders of Canaan, and inheritances there to be divided, more explicit civil rules became needful. Judges and officers shalt thou make, and so forth. Read with care. God himself was to be their immediate governor ^g. What the law ordained, religious ministers were to explain. A divine alliance! Only an upright intention was requisite, verse 19th to be attentively read, to make all ranks sensible of their privileges.

Words of judgement ought to accord with clear law ^h. It is the very nature of language in certain cases to be ambiguous. What is clearest should interpret both law and gospel. Dread passion and prejudice. Advocates have some allowance, and should be watched.

To respect persons is a great temptation to wrest. A zeal for justice will be aware of this. Nigh relations are fitly excluded from witness-bearing, to prevent an involuntary bias.

^a Verse 9th, from the beginning of this chapter.

^b James v. 4.

^c Compare Eccl. xi. 1, &c. Luke vi. 37. Acts xx. 35.

^d Matth. xxv. 40, &c.

^e Verse 11. ^f See Exod. xvi. from verse 19.

^g Compare Prov. viii. 15.

Deut. xi. 16, &c.

^h Compare 2 Peter iii. 16.

To take a gift, while a cause is depending, should be understood as criminal, and an insult to a judge's integrity. What an awful monument was the learned Lord Bacon! The greatest, meanest of mankind. Consider well the texts referred to ^d.

The sovereign excellence of a judicial chair is justice ^e. I put on judgement, &c. Happy for both worlds. Law in Britain is above the King.

LXI. A KING.

Chap. xvii. 15. *Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee whom the LORD thy GOD shall choose : one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee : thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.*

GOD, infinitely wise, foreseeing that, in imitation of their encompassing neighbours, the children of Israel would wish for a king to rule over them, resolves to grant this : and, from the text downwards, lays down methods of conduct for such. They were indeed far from dutiful, the far greater part of them, and the people had fair warning of this ^e. To be attentively considered, as a just representation of despotic power, or monarchy uncontrolled by law.

A King, such as our own, is gracious to live under, an inestimable temporal blessing! One who would please the LORD, would, for a time at least, act from principle, as of his choosing, even Saul. His successor had more excellences, though not perfect neither. The text describes what should be, not what was. He did maintain the divine unity and worship through life, and so far was a man according to God's heart. The majority after him were quite of a different stamp, lifted up, and detestably idolatrous, issuing in tremendous vengeance.

A great regal quality then was to be from among the brethren, when compatible with other established rules. An

^d Exod. xxiii. 8. Lev. xix. 15. Prov. xvii. 8, 23. Eccl. vii. 7.—xx. 29.

^e Job xxix.

f 1 Sam. viii. 5, &c.

obvious conciliatory circumstance. But what did specially concern the Jewish state, that he was neither to multiply horses for himself, or the people, by a trafficking with Egypt, the sink of idols. Nor could their land subsist numbers: neither was gold in great quantities to be a principal object.

When set upon the throne of his kingdom, he was to write him a copy of the law, to make deep impression of it upon his mind. And it shall be with him, and so on. Read the passage. Hereby life and prosperity would be best insured.

The earliest rise of all superiority in the social compact has been merit, and an obligation to exert that for the public good. Great and just objects of choice. A decent instalment is due to such, as leading both to pleasure and awe. Yet are mere pomp and show the smallest honours of royalty. Where rulers and ruled are in suitable terms, their best and surest support is ALMIGHTY GOD §.

LXII. CHRIST LIKE MOSES.

Chap. xviii. 15. *The LORD thy GOD will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.*

THE ultimate accomplishment of this prediction was in our Blessed LORD, as appears from Acts iii. 22, &c. To be carefully read. God had approved of Israel's request^h, not to hear his voice, as in Horeb, by thunders and lightnings; and then subjoins his promise of a prophet from among their own brethren, whom they might speak with after the most easy and conciliating mannerⁱ. Answerable to none other save the MESSIAH foretold^k.

Numbers of the ancient Jews, we are assured, understood the words of Moses as now explained. So Philip^l and Nathanael. He was to be a man, but most signally inspired for Israel's advantage^m. All conducing much to illustrate the text, if not

g 1 Kings xii. 1.

h Verse 16th of our chapter.

i Compare

Heb. xii. 18. with attention.

k Isa. xlii. 1, &c.

l John i. 45.

m John iv. 25.—viii. 28.—xii. 49, 50.

alluding to it. If understood as some do, of a succession of prophets, still one of greatest eminence might be most referred to.

The similitude, or likeness to Moses, was in general, that of his true and proper humanity, as a foundation for his whole exemplary usefulness, his patience and fortitude in particular^m. Like Moses too, CHRIST was raised up to the Jews firstⁿ. His pedigree could then be known with the utmost exactness. An early and dreadful error among Christians was denying the reality of CHRIST's person, to avoid the scandal of the cross, against which St. John aims a great part of his first Epistle^o.

CHRIST, no less than Moses, did predict things future. He was in legislation too far more spiritual, for which, see at leisure, Matthew v. 17, to the end. Indeed after the gospel, heathen moralists themselves did much improve in their writings. Witness Seneca, Epictetus, Antoninus, and others. Hereupon ought infidels to blush. Never till CHRIST came, did such a prophet and lawgiver as Moses appear. One too, who did so many astonishing beneficent miracles. How precise was the foresight of his own sufferings, and death, and resurrection. The ruin of Jerusalem, and the Temple, with Josephus, an eye witness, to support the fulfilment, is altogether astonishing.

Their tremendous overthrow, and dispersion, is still a standing argument for Christianity. God grant the veil to be soon removed! In proportion to our gospel evidences ought to be the strength of our faith and obedience^p.

LXIII. JUDICIAL WITNESSING.

Chap. xix. 15. *One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.*

STONE marks, for dividing of lands, have been very ancient. Whence, the designed altering of them was a

^m John xiii. 13, &c. ¹ Peter ii. 21.---iv. 1. ^{Rev.} iii. 12. ⁿ Acts iii. 26.

^o See Rev. i. 18.

^p Heb. ii. 2, 3.---x. 26 ^{John} xv. 22.

great crime ^q. Temptations from sloth were numerous and powerful. The guilt too might be soon perpetrated ^r. In some cases, it might be very difficult to obtain redress, demanding a sentence of regular magistracy and witnessing.

To guard against falsehood or slip of memory, more than one testimony was required. An ultroneous witness is very suspicious. He should wait for a regular call to swear. A character for understanding, and goodness, should be sought after. It is not probable that many such should be mistaken together, or enter into party views. How dreadful is the certification in the texts referred to ^r? A regular oath is real worship.

In swearing judicially, there should be an exact agreement between thoughts and words. To speak in parts only, when the whole is required, will not justify, but to establish right by truth. Common oaths lead to perjury, and are no less absurd than irreverent. Parties ought to be cool. Magistrates should warn. A delay may often be needed. How often do passionate and coveting swearers add the name of God to a lie? Such are the skum, and pests of mankind.

LXIV. RULES OF WAR.

Deut. xx. 3. — *Hear, O Israel; Ye approach this day unto battle against your enemies: let not your hearts faint; fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them.*

THE children of Israel had it in command to offer terms of peace to Canaan, if the inhabitants would leave their land without fighting, and, thus banished, have time to repent. To maintain the belief and worship of one God was the design of their election, and to punish obstinacy in sin. Even such war was to be a last resort ^t.

No countenance is given to ambition, or secular views ^u.

^q Chap. xxvii. 17. Prov. xxii. 28.

^r Compare Hos. v. 10.

^s Zech. v. 1, &c. Mal. iii. 5. Rev. xxi. 8, 26. Compare verse 16, 17th of our chapter, to be read with great care to verse 21st. Jer. iv. 2.

^t Verse 2.

^u Verse 10, 11.

Rulers,

Rulers, in other countries, must be left to judge as they are able. Property unpossessed, as in the case of Abram, might be taken up, and their own resumed, after usurpation. Thus, in effect did Canaan belong to Israel. It was theirs, even while in Egypt. The ejection of idolaters too had an express divine command. Becoming tributaries however, they might save their lives. War seems allowed, to thin the world of evil doers.

Verse 5th of our chapter contains a very humane rule, which yet, may not always be possible to put in practice : What man is there, and so forth. Military, civil, and sacerdotal officers were to act in concert. The praise of all success is due to God. Right Jewish families were churches. Upon like principle, the law to give licence to attend a new planted vineyard. Read the text. In Judea, grapes and other fruits were peculiarly needed for subsistence.

A late betrothed wife was not soon to be left neither ^a. An obvious example of tenderness. Here all connections had an interest, and therefore was wise policy. Nor was it proper that the fearful, and faint hearted ^b, should be taken to war, as what in like manner might injure others. Soldiery, as much as possible, should be picked men. A press-warrant, therefore, is matter of great trust. The brave and willing deserve much.

It is of great consequence that leaders in an army be chosen by people of skill ^c. In this, experience more than speculation is to be regarded. The nearer that a nation comes in spirit to the above rules the better. God, well attended to by all ranks, gives confidence ^d. Yet was the case of Israel a very special one, and can only account for their tremendous orders ^e. Thou shalt smite, and so on. Still more severe measures afterwards were to be taken. It is much for the honour of victors to spare, and use the conquered with pity. Even household stuff and trees, as much as possible, ought to be taken care of.

^a Verse 7th.^b Verse 8th.^c Verse 9th.^d Verse 1st.^e Verse 13th.

LXV. HUMANITY.

Chap. xxii. 4. *Thou shalt not see thy brother's ass or his ox fall down by the-way, and hide thyself from them; thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.*

EVEN after the establishment of Israel in the land of Canaan, there might differences arise between them, from the narrowness of their bounds. Before that, tabernacles, or tents in the wilderness, were of easy molestation. Much humane counsel, therefore, was requisite in both states. Their vine and olive yards, a source of chief subsistence, could not be very strongly fenced. Their animals for food and sacrifice were also valuable to them, and required special notice.

Hence the wise commands from verse 1st of our chapter, all of them mild, soothing and beneficial otherwise. No age, or place, but must be better for them. To see a brother's ox, or sheep in danger, demands immediate aid. The more domestically useful, the more haste and pains. There may be reasons for killing them yet unknown to us. Let their enjoyments, while they live, be as many as possible. Sweet-looking, and more than harmless, they seem to require this from us. Even children of taste delight to see them. It is kind indeed to prevent their ignorantly hurting, or wandering away. Not to help, in such cases, is like wilfully hiding one's self, or being inhumane. An opposite manner may prevent much mischief. Though a stranger to thee, he whose the animal is, is a brother-man, and the law of nature is ^a to be well got by heart ^b.

In certain cases, public advertisements ought to be made for finding out the owner, and to have reparation for lost time, &c. Be sparing withal to the troubled loser. Consider well verse 3d, for knowledge and admiration of Jewish humanities. The ass, though dull, was patient of labour, and maintained with ease. The female mind is understood to be at least equally sensible in the above cases, or any similar. True faith

^a Matth. vii. 12.

^b Compare Exod. xxiii. 4. likewise verse 2d of our chap. strengthens

strengthens the generous nature. To overburden of design, is horrible, but may be done from ignorance, and should be pitied, much more by a false step, or bad road ^a. The good Samaritan, with the two monster priests. Open the eye wide, upon probable affliction. Dumb suffering affects true nature much.

Say not neither, the man is mine enemy, for, is the ox, or the sheep such ^b.

LXVI. OTHER ACTS OF HUMANITY.

Chap. xxii. 6, &c. *If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in the way in any tree, or on the ground, whether they be young ones or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young, or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young; but thou shalt in any wise let the dam go, and take the young to thee; that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.*

THE sexes, in all civilized nations, are distinguished by their outward dress, whence mutual great advantages are derived. The woman shall not wear ^c that which pertaineth to the man, &c. Besides being hurtful to purity, the practice then might be idolatrous. Thus was Venus detestably worshipped.

Verse 6th of our chapter marks a condescension of tenderness very pleasing, If a bird, and so on. Thou shalt in any ways let the dam go. Taming birds with some is pleasant, for beauty and house music, and may even be designedly sought; though not cruelly used. To plunder a nest from wantonness can never be vindicated. Birds, like ourselves, have their feelings; and what if a superior force were to be cruel in our own case? The idea, in both cases, should be full of horror. Cultivate humanity, O ye young ^d. A permission not to torture, but, as mildly as may be, to use. Even brutal barbarity in killing for food is indefensible. And, O, inoffensive animals, what have you done?

^a Compare Luke x.
Matth v. 44, &c.

^b Read again Exod. xxiii. 4, and think well of
^c Verse 5th. ^d Think of Psal. viii. 8, &c.

Length of joyous days, though few in number, is true life ; those of reason and piety above every other. Act as almoners of heaven, and heaven will care for you. Behold the fowls ^a, God careth for them, and so ought we ^b. Keep barns and barn yards open to a fair market. Possess not beyond measure, even while a brute wants. Rule like a pastor prince ^c.

Houses in the east had flat roofs, and for prevention of sad accidents, were to be railed about. A most minute care in Omnipotent love ! and lesson in every similar case to mankind. Sowing with divers seeds is difficult to understand the prohibition of. Most probably, it did then oppose some religious custom of idolaters. So the learned Jew, Maimonides, some say, that mingled seeds do injure one another. The first-fruits in such case could not be so well offered. Health and right use of property are now only to be considered. Ploughing by creatures of unequal strength must be prejudicial. Likewise of very unequal tempers, and motions.

A God so good, we can never sufficiently adore and celebrate ^d.

LXVII. OF JUSTICE AND CHARITY.

Chap. xxiv. 14. *Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates.*

ALL duty is for human good ^e, strictly parental, pleasant and gracious. Hence, from pure love, God must be displeased with the wicked who oppress their inferiors. Thou shalt by no means do so ^f, and whether Jew, or stranger. Over-work them not, and pay punctually. Oppressors in a free country are as soon as possible left to themselves. In cases of servitude, they hurt their own interest. Detestable to equals in the main ! Did not he who made the one, make the other ? And who appoints unto them their different ranks ? The avenger of wrongs ^g, where to vex, is to oppress in

a Matth. vi.

b Psal. cxlvii. 7. &c.

c AGSxx. 35.

d Compare Psal. cxlviii. 7. &c.

e Micah vi. 8.

f Verse 14.

g Mal. iii. 5. Levit. xix. 33.

the margin. A rise of affection and kindnesses are due to those who improve.

Think well of verse 15th in our chapter, thou shalt give, &c. Sin is here put, as often elsewhere, for the punishment of it ^a. Therefore, be circumspect, my son.

Fathers in all cases have not to answer for their children ^b. Each have to give an account for themselves. An inviolable rule of equity. To visit, &c. in the second commandment, is to be understood temporally, as exemplified, when taken captives into Babylon for seventy years. Some crimes still produce a transmission of disorders, a great enhancement of their guilt.

Magistratical conduct ^c is well set forth, and should be read with gratitude in a land like ours. They are as in God's stead, and bound to imitate him. From verse 19th, certain acts of mercy are recommended, and must be agreeable to peruse. Divine legislation is wonderful. Relicts from harvest-cutters, the poor had right to glean. A special blessing of God was to follow this ^d.

The olive and vine trees were not to be over-thoroughly shaken neither ^e. Both powerfully nutritive and cheering ^f. When thou gatherest the grapes, &c. : All, or most superfluities were to be regarded as alms for the necessitous.

LXVIII. JUST WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

Chap. xxv. 13. *Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights, a great and a small.*

IN carrying on the commerce of life, a strict degree of exactness is requisite, to have value for value. To defraud therefore, by weight or measure, is detestable. This requires arts, which wrong under an appearance of equity, and are not easy to convict transgressors of ^g. Thou shalt not have in thy bag ^h divers weights; made of stones ancient-

^a See James iv. 5. compare Tobit. iv. 17. &c.

^b Verse 16th of our chap.

^c Verse 17, 18. ^d See Lev. xix. from verse 9, &c. and read in rapture.

^e Verse 20, of our chapter ^f Read verse 22. ^g Compare verse 5, & 11.

^h Verse 13.

ly, as in the margin. Those of cast metal are less apt to wear, and to be broken. One to buy in with, and another to sell out with, is deliberate and base to an extreme; especially in nice goods. If much needed at the same time, so much worse. A single instance out of hundreds, would be too much.

Divers measures, upon the same principle as above, are odious ^c. An ephah in the margin, and seems to have been a Jewish standard once: Others, in like proportions, were made from this. The young and simple cannot so well judge here ^d. But thou shalt have a perfect and just measure, as you hope for God's blessing. Encompassed about with idolaters, they were bound to be the more at one among themselves.

Righteous trade is a great mean of national support. Forgeries of all sorts are most prejudicial. Magistrates appointed to watch against these are a great public blessing ^e. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. The above crimes, verse 16, are specially abominable. Let every deliberate cheat read, and tremble ^f.

LXIX. THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE.

Chap. xxvi. 16. *This day the LORD thy GOD hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgements: Thou shalt therefore keep and do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.*

THE favour of God's covenanting with the children of Israel, though great, was far inferior to the condescending method taken with us Christians.

To all sincere believers in the LORD JESUS, it may be said this day, from the first establishment of his gospel, thy God, by CHRIST JESUS, hath commanded thee to do these his statutes and judgements ^g: For the grace of GOD, &c. To be often thought of, as all good in themselves, and profitable; and whereof those by Moses were only preparative. A powerful obligation to obey ^h.

Moreover, the above laws of the Christian covenant are all of them, together with divine promises, ratified in the blood

^c Verse 14.

^f Compare Exod. xvi. 36.

^g Read Lev. xix. 35, 36.

^h 1 Thes. iv. 6. Col. iii. 25. Eccles. iv. 1.---xxxiv. 21, 22. Amos. viii. 4.

Isa. x. 1, 2. Hab. ii. 6, 9, 12. Isa. x. 3. 2 Sam. xii. 1. Eccles. xxxv. 12.

ⁱ Summed up Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^k Agreeable to 2 Pet. i. 4. 1 Jo. v. 3.

of our LORD CHRIST ^c. He loved the church, and gave himself for it. How affecting ought that principle to be with all his followers, to cleanse them as water, by the word? Thou shalt therefore keep and do them, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul ^d. Blessed habit of affection! It is thus that angels obey ^e.

It belongs to every true Christian, nay is essential, that he avouch the LORD JEHOVAH to be his GOD; as did the ancient Jews, verse 17, of our chapter: For their chosen portion ^f. What can be said higher? Not as I will, but as thou willest. They are of one mind with infinite perfection ^g.

Such doth the LORD GOD also avouch to be his, verse 18, of our chapter ^h. How inestimable those benefits ⁱ! The FATHER is ever with them ^k. How dear are thy words, O LORD! How sweet thy counsels of peace.

What in its primary sense was quite national to the Jews, verse 19, is much more eminently to be fulfilled in heaven to sincere Christians. Even now, they are great in divine service. Their excellences are spiritual, and fitted for true enjoyment ^l. Life and life abundantly.

LXX. WORSHIP AND OBEDIENCE.

Chap. xxvii. 8. *And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly.*

BEFORE utensils for writing as now were found out, wax tables seem to have been made for public and family records. Some of general importance were graven upon pillars of stone, as referred to by the text. The children of Israel were to look upon the success of their passing over Jordan, as a special divine covenant blessing, that might ensure their future establishment in Canaan.

Upon their part was required an intimate acquaintance

^c Eph. v. 25. ^d Compare 1 Thess. v. 23. ^e Psal. ciii. 20. Matth. vi. 9.---v. 6. Psal. xvii. 15. ^f Compare 1 Jo. i. 3. &c. ^g Compare Heb. ii. 10.---v. 3. 1 Pet. ii. 21. ^h See 2 Thes. ii. 13. 1 Pet. ii. 9. Tit. ii. 14. ⁱ Psal. lxxxiv. 11. ^k Heb. viii. 10. ^l Compare Heb. viii. 6.

with the words of God's law, and regular attention to his worship ^k: There thou shalt build an altar to the LORD God, &c. Here all sorts of offerings were to be made.

Hence it appears, that the safety and happiness of a nation depends upon him who is infinite ^a. All privileges whatever belong to him ^b. The true heroic style is, His is the glory and the victory. He who is Omnipotent hath the hearts of all men in his hands. By him kings reign ^c. It is righteousness that exalteth a nation. Sin in the end, rarely if ever fails to ruin, as it is always a reproach.

It follows from the above, that to secure divine friendship, a general knowledge and practice of religion is necessary. Thou shalt write and set them up, as before named, the ten commandments in an especial manner. The rest as auxiliary means, and changeable at will. Levites and priests were to teach from written, or engraved records. A method leading to general virtue, the strength of a state. Ignorance is an easy and sure prey. Selfish regards are powerful.

Divine friendship and goodness demand regular worship. There shall you build an altar ^d. Perhaps no nation subsists without some external form. The more nigh to reason, the more advantageous against animal and other appetites. Carry the views of children, as soon as may be, above mere rites. So were the infant Jews treated by God himself ^e. The altar of a heart, formed to prayer and praise, is what God requires ^f. By this means, every worshipper must become good ^g. Such are the best pillars of a state ^h.

LXXI. CURSES FROM MOUNT EBAL.

Chap. xxvii. 14, &c. *And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice, &c.*

A MEN, after solemn words pronounced, signifies consent. The enumeration from the context may be read, and

^k Verse 2. Read attentively with verse 4.
^a Psal. xxxiii. 12, 16. ^b Psal. xxiv. 8. ^c Compare Psal. xxxiii. 10.
^d Verse 5. ^e Gal. iv. 1, &c. to be well considered. ^f John iv. 23, 24.
^g 1 Tim. ii. 8. ^h 2 Cor. iii. 18. ^h Compare Heb. x. 24, 25.
requires

not to be insisted upon. Still those addicted to similar shocking crimes must suffer a curse, unless they reform.

Graven images, for worship, struck at the foundation of all Jewish obedience. A horrible debasement of infinitude ! All depends upon spirit and truth ^a. Explain God's hands, and eyes, and feet to children as they grow up. It is rash and impious both to curse, or bless to what is uncertain, though an oath judicially called to is lawful ^b.

To set light by parents, as in verse 16, is hideous. Next to the original parent of the universe, they claim regard. If they cannot be esteemed from want of qualities, children must not despise, and far less curse them ^c. Ever ought they to be supported in preference to other apparent uses. How many are chargeable here ? Only to over-dress themselves, or be intemperate ^d !

To remove land-marks, to hurt another's property, was and yet is, a great crime ^e. In so narrow a province as Judea, it was peculiarly base deliberate injustice, and comprehensive of every other at heart. Justice requires them to be abhorred as to their crimes, which unrepaired must meet with a curse.

To make the blind wander out of the way, as in verse 18, is terrible ! Whether for sport, or greater cruelty. They are a moving sight ! Add not to, but aid such wretched ! Upon like principle compassionate error, and lead not to it. Advise with calmness. The first in a wrong course may hurt great numbers. Even penitents may not a little suffer hence. Let sceptics and infidels tremble. Rash enthusiasts too are in no small danger. Be diligent and careful, James iii. 13, &c. a fine beneficial passage. Who can know his errors ? Many good have lived to lament their haste. Prove all things ^f.

To pervert judgement what can extenuate ^g, especially where wants are greatest. All, as much as possible, should be in the place of assisting relations to such ^h.

To smite a neighbour secretly argues the most determined cruel nature, fit objects of a curse like their father ⁱ.

^a John iv. 23, 24.

^b Num. v. 22.

^c Exod. xxi. 17. Lev. xx. 9.

^d Consider well 1 Tim. v. 8.

^e Verse 17.

^f 1 Thess. v. 25.

^g Verse 19.

^h See chapter xxiv. from verse 19—x. 18.

ⁱ John viii. 44. See Exod. xxi. 12 — xxiv. 17. Compare verse 25, of our chap.

LXXII. THE BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE.

Chap. xxviii. 1. *And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy GOD, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy GOD will set thee on high above all nations of the earth.*

THOUGH the gospel covenant be chiefly spiritual, temporal advantages accompany and flow from upright obedience, oftener than from vice. Pleasant and peaceful are the ways of experienced wisdom. Its effects quiet and assuring of still better. Thus God doth set both such individuals and nations on high.

Their qualities in our context are nicely set forth. The written word, as the voice of the LORD, is diligently hearkened unto. Clamours of appetite do too often mislead^c. Nothing divine, if possible, should escape us.

All commands ought to be observed, and as nigh to perfection as may be^f. The more progress, the higher recompence^g. In affairs of trade and husbandry, who so like to be successful, in city and field?

How conciliatory is it to deal with the upright?

Early healthful marriages are usually blessed with children, the fruit of the body. Where exceptions are, a wide field for extensive usefulness is laid open. If they adopt not others, they may educate them. Merciful men are much esteemed, and delighted in. Household comforts flow from prudence and industry. Basket and store. Meek and tender-hearted companions add much to the relish of life, both going out, and coming in. Home is to such a religious asylum. Enemies themselves are overcome by good^h, besides gracious divine interposition.

Under a Jewish economy, the nation was to expect the above in greater perfection. Under the gospel, better pro-

^c Consider attentively John iii. 19, &c.

^f Phil. iii. 14. Matth. v. 6.

^g 2 Cor. iii. 18.

^h Prov. iv. 18.

^h Verse 7.

mises are in reserve. Pleasures of the mind are the most serious and lasting of every other. Divine strength will ever be in proportion to severe trials ^b.

LXXIII. THE JEWS REJECTED AND RESTORED.

Chap. xxviii. 25. *The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies : thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them ; and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.*

THE long rehearsal of judgements in this chapter would seem to reach as far forward, as to the cup of Jewish iniquity filled up, by rejecting the true MESSIAH. Then was wrath to fall upon them, as a nation, to the uttermost. A striking evidence to the truth of the gospel. To what other people upon earth can be applied, verse 16. and what follows read with care. Even their captivity in Babylon was but like a shadow of what did happen to them under the Romans, after killing the Prince of Life.

Nearly the whole of Judea was deluged with blood, their city and temple destroyed ^c. All confirmed by Josephus, their own celebrated historian, and a witness. To their ruin and dispersion succeeded almost every kind of evil. See how these, in foresight, did move the compassion of our divine Saviour ^d. Death, even to annihilation, would have been a favour to thousands of them. Whither they did rush for safety, they met with dreadful famine, or a sword ^e. Christians fled from the city and were saved. A most signal and predicted circumstance. All the rest did suffer vexation and rebuke ^f. Pestilence from number of putrid carcases did ensue, to hasten their overthrow. From that and labour together, a burning heat was unavoidable. Flights into caverns were of no avail. Still desolation did pursue by rage and oppression ; sexes and

^b Consider well 1 Peter i. 7, &c. 2 Cor. v. 1, &c. Heb. vi. 16, &c.

^c Compare Matth. xxiv. 21, &c. ^d Luke xxiii. 28. ^e Verse 19, of

our chapter. ^f Verse 20.

kindred had no quarter. In the end their poor remains were sold for slaves.

Thus was begun their last tremendous national judgement, and still they continue a distinct hated people in the main. They are known of all, and incorporate with none. They did not hearken to the voice of the LORD, in his CHRIST ^a. Plagues, taking every thing together, without a parallel.

Yet, thank God they have not stumbled, to fall for ever ^b, but as one mean in providence, to convert the Gentiles. Read the rest of that last cited fine chapter. Nationally, it is to be hoped, the Jews will yet live, though as to time and manner quite uncertain ^c. Then will the LORD turn their captivity and gather them ^d. The spiritual import of which passage, after all, is the most agreeable. Let us not be high-minded, but fear ^e.

LXXIV. THE WORD MANIFEST.

Chap. xxx. 11. *For this commandment, which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.*

THE more obvious that law is, the more binding. This is the case with that which belongs to every age and nation. Ceremonies manifold and burdensome do prepare the infant mind for what is best. See and rejoice in Heb. viii. 10, as most applicable to our text. From elements we are come to what is perfect ^f. Happy for us the whole Jewish ritual is abolished ^g. Gospel positive duties are few and impressive, viz. baptism and the LORD's Supper ^h. Love is the sum of acceptable obedience. There are no scripture obscurities in what is fundamental ⁱ.

We should not wish the commands of God other than they are. The word is not hidden, neither is it far off.

What seems at first difficult soon becomes easy ^k. Here

^a Chap. xviii. from verse 15. ^b Rom. xi. 11. ^c See Deut. xxix. 29 --- xxx. 1.

^d Rom. xi. 23.

^e Rom. xi. 25. to the end.

^f Micah vi. 8.

^g Tit. ii. 11, &c. --- iii. 8.

^h Matth. v. 17, &c.

ⁱ Compare verse 10.

of our chapter.

^j Isa. xlv. 19.

^k Compare Rom. x. 9, 10.

there is nothing abstruse, nothing mysterious. Make not difficulties only for the sake of explaining them ^a. One would think that some degree of art is necessary to render duties dark.

Familiarity with the scriptures, in whatever is material, even ordinary capacities are sufficient for. It is like a way high and lifted up. To be ignorant of fundamentals is a crime in the land of light ^b. To make necessary things appear as of difficult apprehension is highly blameable ^c. Discourage not the weak, but condescend to them ^d.

LXXV. A SOLEMN PROTESTATION.

Chap. .xxx. 19. *I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing : Therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.*

THE minds of men are laid under no force to obey, else there could be no need for sanctions, by rewards and punishments ; see verse 15. Life, in our text, is put for happiness national, and death for suffering : Peculiarly applicable to the Jewish temporal dispensation ; but transferable by Christians to what is spiritual and everlasting : So may verse 19^e. A prime essential duty of religion is to love God. Others cannot uniformly obey him, who is at once the greatest and the best, to be esteemed and delighted in. The glory of angels. As LORD, special affection is due to him for his gracious laws. As GOD, he is infinitely condescending. Yet will not some be wise enough to think of either. With them, divers lusts usurp his place. Monstrous spiritual idolaters.

No wonder that such do not walk in his ways. How can they do so, and not be agreed ! Some good at times, they may do, but as a habit, and universally, they never can. Against

^a See and rejoice in Jo. viii. 12. Rom. viii. 1, &c. ^b See Jo. iii. 19, &c.
^c —xviii. 36. Heb. ii. 2, 3. ^d 2 Cor. xi. 2. ^e Compare Matth xviii. 6.

^c See 1 Cor. ii. 9.

such, let God, the lawgiver, be called to record. He who is Omnipotent and Unchangeable; yea, even his mercy and grace themselves are opposed to them. The blood of the everlasting covenant demands their punishment ^a. Angels who have this knowledge will approve ^b: So will faithful servants of God, who have called to them upon earth ^c. Who can stand as upon the verge of eternity, and not make application?

LXXVI. THE JEWS ENCOURAGED.

Chap. xxxi. 6. *Be strong, and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: For the LORD thy GOD, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.*

SUCH were the words of Moses, verse 1, to all Israel; and when he was no less than one hundred and twenty years old: He could no longer go out and come in, as he had formerly done, verse 2, besides that, for one singular trespass, he had a prohibition laid upon him not to pass over Jordan.

God, after all, was not to withhold his emblematical presence, till their idolatrous enemies were dispossessed. To Canaan, as captain-general, Joshua, the son of Nun, was to lead them, who is enjoined to be strong, and so forth.

When Moses says, be strong, this must be understood, by faith in the divine promises, so often and clearly repeated. Hence, he was to be of steadfast fortitude, because his way was to be fought through, in opposition to foes both numerous and powerful. As yet, they had had large experiences of divine succour to encourage them ^d.

Their happiness as a people, when they did inherit Canaan, was to depend upon their obedience; to facilitate which, this sacred book of Deuteronomy seems to have been wrote, as an abridgement of the former, and delivered unto the sons of

a Compare 2 Cor. v. 20, &c.

b Heb. i. 14.

i Thes. i. 7, &c.

c Compare Prov. i. 24, &c.

Acts xx. 18, &c.

d Compare verse 7.

Levi, for preservation in the ark. The Jewish law did relate to their whole behaviour, as comprised in the love of God and their neighbour ^b. The ten commandments do yet more largely unfold the above, and not of difficult retention neither. Such precepts ought to be well known, and often calmly thought of. The ritual, by Moses, is of less account to us, in these latter days. As preparatives chiefly were they valuable. In the 119th Psalm throughout, the whole taken together have different names, though much of one meaning. The poetry might require such changes, to heighten both beauty and force ^c.

Much pains was taken by the ALMIGHTY, to keep up the knowledge of the Jewish law among them. Moses, as we have seen, wrote them, and gave orders to have them preserved. The young were to be taught by a selection of pieces. If, as was foreseen, the nature of Israel's government should alter into visible human monarchy, each good king was to write a copy for himself; or cause it to be done ^d.

The original copy, at times, was to be taken out, and read with great solemnity. For more common use, another copy was given by Moses, to the elders of each tribe, and to be frequently read; it may be every Sabbath, or festival day. Yet did this most necessary law come to be neglected, through love of sin, as happens in every age. Mad idolatrous and sensual worship, more than any other. In time, it was nearly forgotten; but was revived by the prophet Ezra, after the Babylonish captivity ^e.

Upon the whole, an affectionate obedient regard to the law did mournfully languish till the coming of our Blessed LORD ^f. Their pretences were high, but occupied about trifles ^g. The whole nation then, were either Pharisaic hypocrites, or Sadducean unbelievers. The religion of CHRIST, was to be that of all mankind, whence, ^h I come not to destroy the law, but to fulfil. Here peruse and rejoice. To the law force and vigour is given, by his own example; yet more

^b Matth. xxii. 35, &c.

^c Compare Deut. xxx. 16.

^d Deut. xvii. 18.

^e Chap. vii. of this book, from verse 6.

^f Compare Jo. vii. 19.

^g Matth. xxiii. 23.

^h Matth. v. 17.

by his suffering, death, resurrection, and glorious ascension. Reflect often and devoutly upon 2 Tim. i. 10.

LXXVII. THE JEWS TAUGHT IN A SONG.

Chap. xxxii. 2. *My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew ; as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.*

IN all ages, the method of edifying by song has been practised, and with remarkable success. Thus laws and religion have been transmitted from the earliest times. An abuse has been hurtful, and calls for the greater care upon the part of those who are goodⁱ. Well wrote poetical scripture paraphrases and translations deserve in particular to be encouraged, keeping aloof from doubtful matters. The text is very solemn.

An appeal to heaven and earth, as in verse 1, must rouse attention, from such an one as Moses the aged, and faithful upon the whole. Like one of the fabled ancient birds, he sings to the last ; inviting angels unseen, as well as men : Or provoking creatures of reason, by an address to things inanimate. Let these, if necessary, avenge what is false. Movingly elegant ! Like verse 2, *My doctrine shall drop as the rain, sweet and beneficial ; referring to what he had taught.* The words which follow are inimitably fine ! Even an abridgement would penetrate, so as to fructify. How applicable to right scripture views ? They all lead to what is divine, though gradual and gentle in their operation^k. Most exactly fulfilled in primitive gospel ages^l. Numerous drops, and of bright lustre in every attitude. Herbs not able to bear much, could carry them with ease^m. Transporting ideas ! They not only captivate, but subdue the pious ! Their fruits are complete and lastingⁿ.

ⁱ Compare Eph. v. 18, 19. Col. iii. 16.

^k Compare Psal. cx. 3.

^l Acts ii. throughout.--iv. 32.

^m See Psal. lxxii. 6.

ⁿ Psal. xlv. 4.

Mild persuasive methods of teaching ought ever to be preferred, for uniting heart to heart ^a. Most of all to be regarded when publishing, like Moses, in the name of the LORD, or about himself ^p. A name ever to be adored and loved, as the glory of all true doctrine. Ascribe unto him greatness and goodness unrivalled.

He is the rock, verse 4, infinite, eternal, unchangeable ! His work of all kinds therefore must be perfect ; and his ways, whether yet known or unknown to us, like judgement itself : True, just, and right. Let every ingenuous believer take comfort here, as duty, no less than privilege ^q. What cannot omnipotent affection do ? On the other hand, immortal happy existence was never made for the wicked.

LXXVIII. SINS AGGRAVATED.

Chap. xxxii. 5, 6. *They have corrupted themselves ; their spot is not the spot of his children : They are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus requite the LORD ? O foolish people and unwise ! Is not he thy father that hath bought thee ? hath he not made thee, and established thee ?*

IT is uncertain whether Moses here may not speak of foreseen facts ; or if he spake from knowledge of Israel's perversity. Some would read the text question-ways : Have they corrupted ? and so on, to verse 4. In that case, their spot is not the spot of God's children ; undeliberate, or incidental, but malignant. An adulterous alienation from their blessed origin ^r. Wicked to the uttermost.

Some sins are of easy pardon, comparatively speaking. A spot of genuine children, upon the whole, and no small comfort ^s. Angels themselves are not literally perfect ^t. What may be soon known as evil cannot be deemed an infirmity. Here, let pride and passion be alarmed.

^a Compare Isa. xlii. 1, &c.

^p Matth. vi. 9.

^q Psal. l. 23.

^r Compare 2 Thes. iii. 2.

^s See James iii. 2.

^t Compare 2 Cor. vii. 1.

Phil. iii. 14. Matth. xi. 28, &c.

Sin, when wilful and continued, has no pardon to look for ^u. Even the blood of CHRIST doth not atone for such ^v: They oppose not only the will, but nature of God. In a Christian professor still more blameable, than in a Jew. Each moral precept is a transcript of divine excellence; whom to oppose is as absurd, as vicious ^w. Be not deceived, &c. vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the LORD. How ungrateful are the obstinate wicked ^x. How unnatural to themselves ^y.

LXXIX. NATIONAL MERCIES.

Chap. xxxii. 7. *Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: Ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee.*

THE Jews, of all other nations, were most highly favoured by God; to the consideration of which, they are here directed in a variety of similar, yet affecting phrases, as an argument for future obedience. Read the passage attentively, as containing motives of pure public gratitude; and specially applicable to the British kingdom.

May it not be said, that when the MOST HIGH divided the nations, as in verse 8, he set both their bounds and circumstances peculiarly favourable for the outward advantages of life? Heights and valleys, at once most beautiful and beneficial.

Then how early did they enjoy the best means for acquiring religious truth! This might admit of large illustration. The LORD's portion, for that cause chiefly, the lot of his inheritance. A word, as the Hebrew original is said to signify, denoting cord; to answer led, verse 8, or compassed, as in the margin. What a striking security, not from passible lofty mountains, but the surrounding ocean. Here too, the ALMIGHTY found us, as in a desert land, quite uncivilized. And

^u Matth. xv. 19. ^v 1 Cor. vi. 9. Rev. xxi. 8, 27. ^w Matth. i. 21. Jo. xv. 22, &c.
^x Gal. vi. 6, 7. ^y 1 Pet. i. 17. Mar. xvi. 16. ^y 1 Pet. ii. 9.
 Rom. viii. 15. Tit. ii. 12, &c.

then

then it was, that he did gradually forward knowledge, keeping them, to speak after the manner of men, as the apple of his eye, or with special tenderness.

The next figurative mark of divine care, verse 11, is too elegant to bear much amplification: as an eagle stirreth up her nest, and so on. All who love the sublime, will peruse this, and observe in it two things: watchfulness over interests at home, and guarding against foreign invasions. Both specially applicable to the children of Israel, and of Britain. What a mild attentive government? And how successful against meditated invasions?

Thus did they, and we after them, ride upon the high places of the earth. O that our gratitude may rise far superior to theirs, and so as to render these our blessings durable. Ask how Israel did degenerate! They, represented by Jeshurun, did wax fat, and kick back. Seers and prophets, as is conjectured from the name by some, they set at nought, yea, grievously maltreated, as certain oxen are known to do their drivers, even the most careful of them. Hence, God himself, through time, was lightly esteemed, verse 17. Vice is detestable!

There is indeed such a thing as loathing the honey-comb itself; the sweet gospel food. O Britons beware. The same just scripture views cannot be too often repeated; even such as in Tit. ii. 11, &c. commit to memory.

LXXX. NATIONAL WISDOM.

Chap. xxxii. 29. *Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!*

THE wisdom of a nation lies in considering God's mercies, on purpose to improve them, verse 7, &c. To neglect this is to hazard their loss, or even worse. The state of the Jews, for ages past, is no less than tremendous. No wonder a patriot ruler like Moses was so much in earnest. Their latter end is a warning to all others.

Great public advantages demand ardent national obedience ^a. A day of thanksgiving signifies so much, if people do not hypocrise. Wise gratitude is serious at the time, and lasting in its consequences ^b. Then, in particular, ought people to be mindful of solemn engagements. From being lukewarm, they will soon come to forget altogether, verse 22. A dreadful provocation !

LXXXI. NATIONAL HORRORS.

Chap. xxxii. 35. *To me belongeth vengeance and recompence ; their foot shall slide in due time : For the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.*

IT has been observed, and with justice, that throughout the whole Old Testament, where large promises are made to obedience ; these are usually set forth in strong terms, reaching Messiah-ward ; and such threatenings made use of to unbelief, as to his mission. Many of these last are to be met with in our context. It will be very useful to think of them with leisure.

From the time of Judah's return from the Babylonish captivity, they were no more idolaters ; notwithstanding their just faith, and good works, did not agree. A large part of them were wicked Sadducean unbelievers as to a future state ; and a larger still Pharisaic hypocrites ^c. What then was to be expected, but poisoning evil upon the back of evil ^d. What filled up the cup of their iniquity, was killing the Prince of Life : Since which time, their name has been a reproach, or by-word, among all nations.

Their vine is the vine of Sodom, verse 32, sour, pestive, abominable ^e. What an aggregate sum of vice ! All from the horrible abuse of divine benefits ^f. Such was lost Judea, and

^a Compare Mal. ii. 2.

^b Psal. l. 23.

^c Compare Acts xxiii. 8.

Matth. xxiii. 23.

^d As in Matth. ii. 7.

^e Compare Ezek. xvi. 49.

^f See Prov. xxx. 9.

fit to be sold even by their Rock, verse 30. Every step towards their overthrow did affect with pity their conquerors, Vespasian and his son : How like were they to people made drunk by the poison of dragons ? verse 33. Josephus, who lived at the time, and not an incompetent judge, tells us, they were ripe for the earth itself to open and swallow them. Is not this laid up in store with me ? verse 34. Their foot, in various ways, shall slide. Peruse the rest.

With how much justice, even to terror, do we hear God say, as in verse 39 ? I, even I, &c. Be attentive here. He is still the same invariable foe to consummate vice, verse 41, and downwards.

In the case of true Christian believers, there is much ground for joy, verse 43. He will yet be merciful even to the Jews, when penitent. Ever graciously correcting. Let us see, in their long continued dispersion, a powerful evidence for the gospel, and endeavour by shining good works, to provoke them to jealousy. Hold forth the simplicity of CHRIST to them, for avoiding the wo in Matth. xviii. 6. What happy days may believers yet see ^a.

LXXXII. THE EXCELLENCY OF ISRAEL.

Chap. xxxiii. 29. *Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency ! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places.*

THE prosperous state of the Jews after passing Jordan, and their establishment in Canaan, are above foretold. In Jerusalem their splendour was to be most conspicuous, and to have on it more spirituality. Such were the Israel principally spoken of by our text, the same as Jeshurun ^b.

Hence, it would appear that one great source of national enjoyment is to be regularly taught the divine laws : a whole tribe of Israel were set apart to that important purpose, with

^a Rom. xi. 15, &c.

^b Verse 26.

clear written rules laid down to them ^b. They were to read and illustrate. The memoirs of former ages were also to be enlarged upon. Yet but a shadow of better times ^c. To the poor the gospel is preached ^d. Thankfully to be owned as in Matth. xi. 25. Inestimable excellence ! How different is Britain now, from the state in which it was found by Cæsar ?

Teachers are likewise to worship, sweet as incense is to us, before God : and such is the portion of our people. Devotion freed from what is controversial is a constraining excellence. Better than all burnt sacrifices.

As a native consequence of the former too, the people who know, and worship as they ought, shall be saved, both defensively and offensively in respect of the soul ; which is the true and proper man. That of ancient Israel was chiefly temporal. How much more highly favoured under the gospel ? In this light view the text, as in Luke i. 76, &c. Delightful summary of divine excellences !

The proud boasts of spiritual enemies God will disappoint, as he did those of Pharoah and others who opposed the ancient Jews, thus making them liars. As a morsel did he pluck his own out of their teeth, and tread their enemies under them. In gospel days, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church. Now not a temple is left to the former heathen gods of either Greece or Rome. Apostate Julian could not rebuild that of Jerusalem. All attempts since against Christianity have demonstrated their authors to be liars, What productions of value has the pretended age of reason brought forward ? Its lies are rendered quite contemptible. If people will not read they cannot rank among the excellent.

^b Isa. viii. 20.

^c Heb. viii. 10.

^d Luke vii. 22. James ii. 5.

PART V.

I. THE PRAISE OF MOSES.

Chap. xxxiv. 10. *And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face.*

THE account of Moses' death, and what follows in his praise, must have been subjoined by some other, and yet is authentic. Perhaps by Joshua, Samuel, or Ezra. It was likewise worthy of divine goodness to interpose, considering the resemblance he had to the great MESSIAH ^a.

He was a prophet who not only taught but foresaw things to come. The law was given to him from the ALMIGHTY, moral, ritual, and judicial ^b. By his means the land of Canaan was assured, again and again to Israel, as is now to Christians, that which is heavenly.

Till MESSIAH appeared, Moses had no equal in either of the above respects ^c. His familiar converse with the Supreme Being was like that of one man with another, face to face ^d.

Yet what were the signs and wonders by Moses compared with those by CHRIST? either as to number or beneficence ^e? Infinitely Munificent! nor was Moses perfect like his great antitype. The worst of CHRIST's enemies could not convict him of sin ^f.

For wise ends the burial place of Moses was concealed. Not so that of CHRIST, whose resurrection was to declare him Son of God. The just boast of all his faithful followers ^g. Let faith and rich spiritual blessings animate.

^a Chap. xviii. 15. ^b Heb. iii. 5. ^c Chap. xxxii. 2. Gal. iv. 1, &c.
Isa. xlii. 1, &c.—lxi. 1. ^d Num. xii. 8, &c. Matth. xi. 27, &c. 1 Tim. iii. 16.
^e Verse 12. Acts x. 38. ^f John iv. 34. ^g 1 Peter ii. 21.
2 Tim. ii. 11, 12. Rom. vi. 4. Gal. vi. 14.

JOSHUA.

II. JOSHUA COMMANDED AND ENCOURAGED.

Chap. i. 9. *Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the LORD thy GOD is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*

BEFORE the death of Moses, Joshua had been chosen of God to succeed him as Captain General to the children of Israel. His name, the same as JESUS, signifies Saviour. The comprehensive direction given to him may be read verse 7th, where the book of the law is referred to; perhaps the original copy of it. This he was to meditate upon with great frequency, as held forth by the words, day and night^a. Nor were inferiors to be otherwise minded, having at least one for every tribe.

They were the ALMIGHTY'S by special covenant, and whilst obedient, he would not fail of fulfilling his promises to them.

The divine emblematical presence would ensure their protection^b. A prime security against dismay^c. The law itself is no other than a transcript of God in his moral attributes with men^d.

If God be thus with such, who can be against them^e. A high recommendation of the written word.

Hence observe, how it comes that numbers of people are destitute of courage. They seldom read God's word, and seldom meditate upon it^f. The higher that people are in rank, or office, the more need they have to be strengthened from God's law^g.

a Psal. i. 2.

b John xv. 7 ——— xiv. 21.

c Psal. xliii. 4, 5.

d Heb. viii. 10.

e Psal. lxxxiv. 11. Matth. vii. 11.

f Psal. xix. 7, &c. — cxix. 9 — i. 3.

g Luke iv. 1, &c. Heb. iv. 12. Col. i. 16.

III. RAHAB.

III. RAHAB.

Chap. ii. 3. *And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come to thee, which are entered into thine house ; for they be come to search out all the country.*

A HARLOT, as understood by us, denotes an extreme bad character ; but since the apostle ^a ranks her with many good ^b, we may translate the Hebrew word by that of innkeeper, as do numbers of the learned. Such keepers in those early ages were of excellent fame, and the design of their inns very charitable ; public generous institutions ^c, whither the good Samaritan brought the wounded man. Hosts of special benevolence were set over them, who, in cases of great expenditure, might be repaid. In cities more especially a master, mistress and servants.

It were pity that chaste Rahab's character should be mistaken. When she had two spies, sent by Joshua, upon the flat roof of her house, she declared to them her belief of the one only Living and True God, with the promises made by him to Israel. She had also heard of miracles wrought in their behalf, as fit ground for her faith, which is likewise narrated with much precision. As an innkeeper to the state, she had some good leisure, and knew how to make use of it. Perhaps as a private person she was wealthy. We heard, says Rahab, and so on, how you have been for many years amazingly cared for.

The whole is ascribed to the LORD their God, though brought up amidst gross idolaters. How singularly pious then ^d. In heaven above, &c. that is the one universal Sovereign. Next she engages them to swear to her, by him, that they would shew kindness to her father's house, when the city should be taken. She does not boast, but knew what obligations lay upon their devout gratitude ; likewise the sacred binding nature of an oath, nor would be put off with light promises. Give me, along with these, a token. Swear by

^a Heb. xi. 31.

^b James ii. 25.

^c Luke x.

^d Verse 11.

the LORD, and so on. Far from the manner of one, who had lived a loose life. The comfort of relations are much upon her mind. And the men did so, saying, our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. If untrue, we are ready to die in your stead by a judicial stroke of heaven.

After the above, she let them down ^e by a cord through the window, and said to them, get you to the mountain for three days, till the pursuers be returned. What follows is more difficult to vindicate from equivocating. The honest fact is, that there are difficulties in the case. If she was in the fault, the scriptures do no where approve of this. She said, there came men unto me^f, but I wist not whence, which in the beginning might be true, though not afterwards. Some say, that the wicked pursuers had no right to truth : rather lax morality. Should Rahab have erred, the strength of temptation may extenuate. Characters in perfection seem not compatible with an imperfect state. Yet what may fit a time of war can be no rule for common life. Spies do their office under great risks. Where there is a clear divine order these may be run. Prudence in great services is essential. Rahab's good faith did lead her to a confirming marriage in the tribe of Judah. Nations covenanted to GOD will ever be safe in the end.

IV. JOSHUA EXHORTS THE PEOPLE.

Chap. iii. 5. *And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves : for to-morrow the LORD will do wonders among you.*

THE Israelites were now advanced to the east side of the river Jordan, at a time when it was hardly fordable, by so great a multitude, and here it was revealed to Joshua, that the LORD ALMIGHTY would do some great thing for them ; which he communicated to them by his chief officers, verse 3. When ye see the ark of the covenant move, go after it : observing due deferences. He likewise himself spake unto the people, one body of them after another, to sanctify them-

^e Verse 15.

^f Verse 4.

selves

selves by pure devotion more than common, to be witnesses of an astonishing miracle upon the river. And so ought people ever to do where there is a prospect of high divine benefits. To sanctify is to separate from common, to what is pious ^a. To cleanse a sinner from the pollution of evil is an important sense ^b. For this purpose, time must be given, with due concern. Abstract from the world and examine past life with care ^c. They were to consider along with this the amazing kindnesses of heaven ^d; whereby even divine blessings are heightened ^e. How rich to people of this sort must redeeming love appear ^f? Such do live in raptures above the world ^g.

Besides habitual preparation, special lively frames may be endeavoured after. Seek a blessing upon common meals for both use and comfort. Rise in proportion with the value of things, by praise. A regular holy life, after all, is preferable to temporary fervour ^h.

V. GOD'S TESTIMONY TO JOSHUA.

Chap. iii. 7. *And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.*

GOD might speak to Joshua by an audible voice from the tabernacle, a way in many cases less familiar than he did to Moses. Here was the ark of the covenant, whence it had likewise the name of testimony; above the covering was the mercy-seat, or propitiatory, under the two cherubim-wings, whence voices occasionally came, as now to Joshua; where a former miraculous passage through the Red-Sea seems clearly alluded to in verses 9, and 15.

Astonishing throughout! No other could more tend to

^a Gen. ii. 3.

^b 1 Cor. vi. 11. 2 Cor. vii. 1.

^c Psal. cxix. 59.

Luke xv. 15, &c.

^d 1 Peter iii. 15. Ezek. xxxvi. 23. Matth. vi. 9.

^e 1 Tim. iv. 5.

^f Eph. iii. 16. 1 John iii. 1, 2. Gal. vi. 14. Isa. lxi. 1, &c.

Eph. i. 3, &c.

^g Col. iii. 1. Exod. xix. 10.

^h Eph. v. 1, 2, 25.

Matth. v. 16. Heb. xii. 14. 1 Thess. iv. 3. Isa. vi. 3.

magnify Joshua in sight of Israel. When it pleases God to send his messengers to mankind, he fails not to authenticate their commission. Even Pharoah in the end was obliged to let Moses and Israel go. So Joshua and they did pass the swellings of Jordan. Under the New Testament, what signs and wonders were wrought by CHRIST and his Apostles? Mahomet, on the other hand, ruled by the sword, as after him did antichristian Rome. To enter upon arduous offices without evidence is like seeking for neglect and suffering.

It is the duty of all to whom messages are brought, to ask for a sign, or seal. Either this must be done for entire satisfaction, or people be brought into great danger. In cases of clear credibility, let such be magnified by esteem and love. Good qualities and a regular course of trials are all we have now to look for. Much honour is due to such, for their works' sake, and that to increase by increase of worth. Reputation from capable judges is stimulating ^a.

VI. MEMORIAL OF JORDAN PASSAGE.

Chap. iv. 6. *That this may be a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.*

BEFORE the invention of letters, memorial signs were made use of as in the passage referred to by our text. Thus did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So in all other countries emerging from barbarism. To add a stone to one's cairn was proverbial among ourselves. Monuments of ancient conquests are not to be numbered.

On certain times of the year Jordan swelled uncommonly broad ^b, owing, it is probable, to the melting of snows in summer months. This time was wisely chosen, as then their

^a Chap. iv. 14. ¹ Chron. xxix. 25. ¹ Peter iv. 10, 11. ^b Chap. iii. 15.

enemies

enemies might be most secure, and the miracle appear so much the more wonderful. A river broad, deep and rapid ! Its waters upon both sides rising as if congealed, or the undermost vanishing quickly into the dead sea : admiration for a space might hinder them to move.

After the ark, they enter, pass and rejoice in God, mutually congratulating. Therefore to be kept up from impious forgetfulness ^a. From the bed of the river, stones were to be taken, and might be compared, as to cast, or colour. The speed of their obedience did argue the strength of their faith. All most fitly explained. Such sights and recitals must ever affect. The pious, brave and patriotic, do not soon weary of them. If put into song, they quite enrapture. How much more those respecting the great God and our SAVIOUR ^b. In proportion to grandeur and blessings ought devout fervours to be ^c. Children grown up should be well taught in these. Revere baptism and the LORD's Supper ^d.

VII. ISRAEL'S GOD EXTENSIVELY KNOWN.

Chap. iv. 24. *That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty; that ye might fear the LORD your GOD for ever.*

PROBABLY the whole earth at this time might not be so much inhabited as now, if certain parts were at all known. This, with the next to universal prevalence of idolatry, may account for the choice of Judea, as a kind of central part, for establishing true faith, even so far back as Abraham, who, in time by his descendants, was to possess this ^e.

The hand of the LORD denotes his power. Abraham and Lot's families kept up some knowledge of the true God, by worship and signal recompences ; when separated, they did to a certain degree extend this. Think of the divine interposition in the days of Melchizedek. Likewise Abraham's jour-

^a Verse 1, &c.

Rom. xii. 1.

^b Col. iii. 16.

^d Heb. x. 24, 25.

^c Luke i. 76, &c. Eph. iii. 16.

^e 2 Peter ii. 3.

ney to Gerar, with useful religious events. How fitly and beneficially he did provide a wife for his son Isaac.

Jacob, or old Israel, after this did keep Laban's family from degenerating, and teach the neighbourhood. So might he and his children be of great use in Egypt. The oppression of Israel there did manifest the true GOD to them by miracles, more than ever. Then, in effect, was the arm of the ALMIGHTY made bare in behalf of Israel. That which delivered from oppression was tremendous, and kept in remembrance by a solemn annual passover.

Then did Moses guide them, by miracle upon the back of miracle, which could not be hid. What a marvellous display of Omnipotence, at the Red Sea ! The whole earth must have known it, and supports in the wilderness. Remaining signatures stand uncontradicted even by infidels. Heathen writers themselves do more than hint at them. A passage over Jordan, with an altar at Gilgal, would well, and long be known by all around ; strengthened by every new miracle that did follow. Thus did JEHOVAH, LORD of Israel, make himself seen. In Canaan, the peculiar mode of Jewish establishment, worship, and preservation, must have spread far and wide. They were a kind of standing miracle for ages, while in duty.

When indeed they forsook the LORD, public instructive vengeance did follow them. The Babylonish captivity, and their restoration, did open the eyes of thousands, along with their own. And what shall we say to the present state of ancient Israel ? But that they are, and have been monuments of justice to the whole earth ! Still they are a distinct people, and may be owned upon repentance ^a. CHRIST has been, and is yet a light to ungrateful infidels ^b.

a Jo. vii. 19.

Matth. xxiii. 23, &c.——xv. 6, &c.——v. 17.

b Matth. v. vi. vii. Chapters.

VIII. JERICHO BESIEGED.

Chap. vi. 2. *And the LORD said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.*

FOR a while, the Jewish ritual, in each of its parts, could not be observed, amidst frequent wilderness journeyings. Now these rituals much more generally became proper : Circumcision and the passover more especially. This was done at Gilgal, and thereby they became fitted to possess Canaan. Joshua's faith is first tried, for his own, and the good of his people ^d. A vision, or reality, in cases of the present sort, make no material difference : His courage was the same : He is mild, and reverent withal, towards the Most High LORD's ambassador. His worship is of the civil kind, and not religious ^e : So do eastern nations still ^f.

The angel at once advises, and encourages. Jericho, all this while is straitly shut up from intelligence, or relief. GOD, once more speaks to Joshua from the tabernacle, directing ^g to compass the city, &c. His people were to consult their safety, and yet abide firm to order, and without expostulating. Not unlikely the besieged would condemn their parade as vain. For the horns made use of, see Lev. xxv. 9. A long blast, protracted and loud, verse 25, was to be a sure signal of Jericho's ruin, by a tremendous act of justice. These off their guard are an easy prey. Astonishment universal melts the heart. The whole was seen to be supernatural, and should have taught even stupid idolaters. How precious to Israel was the ark of the covenant ? Let fortitude and piety ever conjoin. May Britain's fleets and armies ever thus continue to say, It hath pleased ALMIGHTY GOD to succeed.

^d Chap. v. from verse 13.

^e *Rex. xxii. 9.* *Exod. iii. 2, 5.*

^f *Ecc. v. 1, &c.*

^g *Verse 3. &c.*

IX. AI AND ACHAN.

Chap. vii. 6. *And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the even-tide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads.*

THE prosperous for a time are often unduly elated. Whence, even Joshua himself, after two signal miracles, seems to have forgot certain parts of his duty, before engaging with a new foe: He did not clear the army from a curse against alienating to private property, somewhat of the rich spoils of Jericho ^h. In his haste, he remembers not, and, without consulting, takes upon him to send spies from Jericho to Ai ⁱ.

On both of the above accounts, the anger of the LORD, verse 1, was kindled against the children of Israel, or he saw it proper to chastise them; for strictly speaking, there is no passion whatever in the Divine nature. Joshua and his people, relying with confidence on their own strength, went out to fight, and were smote, so as to see their error when it was too late; insomuch, that even the gallant leader did rend his garments in grief, and fell upon his face, before the ark of the LORD; the elders of Israel following his penitent example.

Yet neither of them at the time do seem to have recollected the entire causes of their suffering, which led them in part to complain. Faith now was wanting, as well as fortitude.

But after this seasonable correction, they are set right again, by a voice from the tabernacle. Action, and not words, were now become necessary, their guilt being fairly laid open to them. A deliberately impious one. Up then, and do as I direct, destroy the accursed from among you; and it shall come to pass, verse 15, that he that is taken with the accursed thing shall be burnt with fire, &c.; and that, after being stoned to death, verse 24: An affecting vengeance! And yet highly proper at the out-set upon an arduous office.

^h Chap. vi. 18.

ⁱ Prov. xxviii. 14.

This being over, a memorial heap, or cairn of stones, was raised on the place. The trial of this wicked, wretched man, is highly instructive, from verse 16. It was taken early in the morning, when sober living people are most cool, and fit for serious business, and in presence of all Israel. Joshua's address to action is moving, and exemplary. The sinner was to glorify the omniscience, power, and justice of JEHOVAH, by a free and full confession; and as fairly warned, it would be in vain for him to dissemble.

Achan candidly acknowledges the greatness of his late sacrilegious crime. A neglect of him who searches the heart was at bottom. What was goodly to the eye did operate upon a coveting heart. He did alienate from heaven, as much as in him lay, to his own private use, and, with that view, did anxiously conceal them. Think now, how wise and gracious the tenth commandment is, in support to the whole second table.

Again, how progressive is the nature of vice ^a. I saw, and coveted, and took. Here, verily, were marks of sincere penitence, and hopeful signs that he was no hardened transgressor. His body could not be saved, yet his soul might. Far different from a mere death-bed confession, after a whole life in sin. Joshua pities and sentences him. Judges may weep, who cannot pardon. Mark well the beginning of evil, to amend. Lying and theft are congenial crimes: Let neither of them be winked at in early life. Yet are churlish superiors dangerous.

X. THE STRATAGEM AT AI.

Chap. viii. 15. *And Joshua and all Israel made as if they were beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness.*

ART in war has been from the earliest ages, and seems defensible. It is often a mean of preserving lives, and does look for it, unless when a truce is set on foot. What passed at Ai, therefore, is not censurable.

^a James i. 14, 15.

Joshua is again encouraged, verse 1, and probably from the tabernacle, when piously consulting. I have, in effect, already given the king of Ai, with all he has, into thine hand, to be dealt with as Jericho was ; only making one provision, as to spoil and cattle. To save blood, a stratagem was to be used, or ambush. The orders given were clear and pointed, as became a great general, verse 5 : An agreed signal was to rouse those who lay in wait.

The command was divine, and the execution prompt. Unity in war, more than most things else, portends success. The brave are never too secure. Miracles themselves require the use of means proposed. A late trivial success had blinded the people of Ai. To try, on purpose to invigorate faith, is friendly ; quite a different thing from feints of falsehood, and for evil ends.

The men of Ai had now no power left them, either to fight, or flee ; whence their discomfiture became tremendous. Their king was taken alive, by way of trophy. A pitiable case ! Yet the justice of heaven must be revered. In another world, God can, and will compensate suffering to the good.

A prey, verse 2, is allowed to the obedient ; the rest consumed with fire : A monument of desolation. A new evidence for the One Only Living and True God, to all the surrounding neighbourhood : Nor could it be hid from future ages. And a like reason must be assigned for the sad taste of the seven idolatrous nations.

Here Joshua built an altar, and did worship with his people. A spirit inseparable from pure fortitude, and heightener of all honest joys *. Devotion and social cheerfulness do well conjoin.

XI. THE PIETY OF JOSHUA.

Chap. viii. 34. *And afterward he read all the words of the law, the blessings and cursings, according to all that is written in the book of the law.*

FEW characters after Moses, in the Old Testament, equal that of Joshua, for courage, piety, and regard to the

* Deut. xxvii. 4, &c.

morals of his people. Whilst the priests and Levites did the duties of their office, himself did read the law aloud ; with its numerous varied blessings and curses. A noble patriotic anxiety !

Thus, none could pretend ignorance ; the whole being read occasionally. So ought parents with their children and servants ^a. God will have all, or nothing ^b.

Sanctions of law require to be often, and well weighed ^c. False grounds of peace should ever be alarmed ^d. Certain natures are best drawn by hope.

As much as may be, explain what is difficult to the young and ignorant. Things easiest to apprehend, notwithstanding, are most beneficial. These concern all states and ranks. Inestimable are the favours of public and private scripture teaching ^e. Give no disgust by over-doing. This leads to subsequent scepticism and infidelity. CHRIST's words are plain, quick, and penetrating. How pleasant to mark the progress of the human mind ! A prime reward in common, to the honourable state ^f.

XII. THE GIBEONITES.

Chap. ix. 6. *And they went to Joshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We be come from a far country ; now therefore make ye a league with us.*

THE miracles attending Israel were known wherever they went, to the attentive. Repentance by this means might have saved Canaan from ruin. An offer was to be made them for peace, which justifies divine equity. All required was to forsake their idols. The Gibeonites were an example in part, though they acted not quite fair.

Hearing of the success of Israel, they gathered themselves together, for opposition, as with one mouth ^g, who had hitherto been overcome. So did not Gibeon, but rather chose

^a Psal. xviii. 21, &c. ^b Prov. xxiii. 26. ^c Matth. xii. 35. ^d Psal. cxix. 4, &c.

^e Deut. xxviii. nearly throughout. ^f Rom. i. 19.--ii. 6, &c.

^g 2 Thes. i. 7, &c. ^h Rev. ix. 13.

ⁱ Col. iii. 16.

^j e. Prov. xxii. 6. ^k Rom. xiv. 1.

^l Verse 2.

to work somewhat wilily. Certain of their inhabitants affect being ambassadors from distant parts, and thus, by permission came to Joshua, then encamped at Gilgal, and sue for peace ^b. Their terms are granted, and they said to Joshua, as representing the whole, we are thy servants. Joshua, wise and cautious, is still inquisitive, when the Gibeonites, for such they really are, do equivocate or lie. A declaration of their simple faith in Israel's God would have done better, for which they did assign at the time most just reasons: we have heard of the fame, and so forth; wherefore we are sent to offer ourselves as thy servants. All a fiction, and deliberately aggravated. So, without taking counsel at the LORD, the elders of Israel consent.

They were to live upon their own terms. At the end of three days Israel become sensible of the imposition, but a path having passed, the Gibeonites are allowed what they did demand; and their cities are taken possession of. An appeal to God, such as had been made, was like a solemn renunciation of their false Deities. And thus, upon the whole, was Israel instrumental of much good.

Admire here, the mysterious ways of providence ^c. A people weak in faith, as yet, and acting accordingly, attain to higher advantages. In a more improved state, none are to do evil that good may come of it. Though lives were granted from reverence to an oath, yet were they made bondsmen, hewers of wood, and drawers of water ^d.

XIII. THE KING OF JERUSALEM.

Chap. x. 6. *And the men of Gibeon sent unto Joshua to the camp to Gilgal, saying, Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites, that dwell in the mountains, are gathered together against us.*

THE people heré named had made peace with Israel, and became slaves. Now it came to pass, verse 1.

^b Deut. xx. 10, 11.

^c Rom. xi. 33, &c.

^d Verse 23.

when

when Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, heard of what Joshua had done, that he and his subjects feared greatly. He sent successfully ^a unto four other kings, for their assistance against Gibeon, who had so lately joined Israel. Joshua, informed of this, went from Gilgal to aid his new allies, and took mighty men of valour with him, having, before hand, consulted at the door of the tabernacle, and been assured of advantage.

Divine countenance did hasten him, whilst he left his camp at Gilgal properly guarded, and then discomfited the whole five kings: a miracle of judgement upon them succeeding, to shew them what **JEHOVAH**, Israel's God, had done. Hail-stones of vast size poured forth, and long continued, did destroy more than the sword had before this. Hence the memorable place was named Beth-horon, importing, say the learned, thunder and lightening.

At this time too, or nigh to it, Joshua, under a divine impulse, and after fervent devout exercise, said, so as multitudes of Israel could hear, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And, either literally these took place, or which comes to the same thing, there was abundance of light to favour the pursuit. Some say, the bold eastern poetical licenses will admit of this last interpretation.

Is not the above, adds our sacred historian, written in the book of Japher? on purpose likely to be sung by Hebrew people in every age. A most wise pious precedent ^b. The design of the whole was to convince the nations that to one God alone did victory belong. Traces of this are said to be found in heathen histories.

Well might our author say, verse 14. and there was no day like this before it, or after. Praying by a special movement of the spirit, has had the testimony of good men in all ages. Without this there is no accounting for Joshua's request, which he could not but know stood in connection with the whole planetary system.

What follows from verse 16, by way of useful terror to the rest, may be read, and needs no explication. Monuments of divine justice must be made occasionally for prevention of

^a Verse 3.

^b Isa. xxviii. 21: Hab. iii. 11. Eccl. xlv. from verse 4.

worse. Let us be thankful for our highly civilizing gospel ^c. To perpetuate the true faith, a huge cairn of stones was heaped together. After the capture of some more cities, and with inconsiderable loss, Joshua with his people returned to Gilgal, and built an altar for public religious worship. Exemplary gratitude !

XV. CONCLUSION TO ISRAEL'S WARS.

Chap. xi. 23. *So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses ; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.*

THE last efforts made by Israel's foes were the most alarming, numerous and strongly armed, yet is Joshua encouraged as formerly, by a voice from the tabernacle, verse 6, Be not afraid, and so on. So Joshua went forward with all the people of war, and was rendered victorious, chasing the enemies of Israel into great Zidon, which lay on the Mediterranean-sea, and was part of Canaan ^d. Certain apparent cruelties, a real need can only defend ^e.

Thus were the promises to Abraham, in his posterity, made out, and known, in some sort to the whole countries around ; and along with that, the knowledge of One only the living and true God. Such vengeance, he, and he alone had right to take, or to ordain. Cities turned or left on an heap, did remain as monuments to future ages. What the LORD commanded by Moses, Joshua left not undone, from Seir south, to Lebanon, under Hermon, northward. Resistance, after what did last happen was but small, and without much loss to Israel ^f. How the land was divided, by way of inheritance, may be seen chapter xiii, having in some good measure ceased from war ; beginning the Jewish Sabbatical years, to be observed for a rest to the ground ^g. The poor, and the beasts of the field, were likewise to have an advantage from it ^h.

c Verse 25, &c.

d Verse 3.

e Verse 11.

f Verse 20.

g Exod. xxiii. 10, &c.

h Lev. xxv. 2, &c 20, &c.

Good husbandry, upon the whole, as well as expressive of trust in God. Upon that occasion of general ease, the misfortunate debtor was not to be forgotten ^a. A face of pious joy was to be seen throughout.

So, at the end of seven sabbatical years, as every fiftieth, possessions, before alienated, were to return. To be intimated by the trumpet jubilee sound ^b. During all the above, the Jews were protected by special Providence from surrounding foes, if obedient.

All notwithstanding, as but shadows of what is pure, spiritual and everlasting, under the gospel ^c, where a rest signifies Sabbath-keeping.

XV. CALEB BLESSED.

Chap. xiv. 13. *And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance.*

HERE we have an acknowledgement of great former merit, and a devout request for continued favours, both signal testimonies of official friendship ^d. A petition, at the same time, is made and answered to his wish, verse 7.

Caleb had a claim to the inheritance, from promise made to him by Moses ^e. Faithfulness is an essential characteristic of worth ^f. In like manner ought scripture assurances to be trusted ^g. God is of one mind, and who can turn him. In a way of duty, Caleb had hazarded every thing, when most able to relish life, verse 7. A great trial of fortitude and prudence together. Patriotism truly heroic; most others upon like service did falsify, being panic struck. The brave are ever true to national felicity. Caleb wholly followed the LORD, verse 8, 9, and that to extreme old age. Strong in heart still, to do duty: He is insensible to common frailties, verse 12. The same good God will be with me. A veteran indeed! An Hebrew asylum was his due. May true British

^a Deut. xv. 1, &c.

^d Chap. xxi. 11, 13.

^b Lev. xxv. Deut. xv.

^c Num. xxxii. 12.---xiv. 24.

^g James i. 17.

^e Heb. iv. 8, 9.

^f Jos. xiv. 6.

sailors and soldiers never want the like ! Nor do they want. In such cases, devotion ought to have some good share of their time, from different reasons. A happy balance to former toils and dangers.

XVI. CHARGE TO THE REUBENTITES.

Chap. xxii. 5. *But take diligent heed to do the commandment, and the law, which Moses, the servant of the LORD, charged you, to love the LORD your GOD, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul.*

THE people here named, for good services, had rest given them from war, on the east side of Jordan, by Moses. After the other tribes miraculously passed Jordan, and did conquer the seven idolatrous nations : The Reubenites, Gadites, and half tribe of Manasseh, represented by some of their chiefs, came to compliment Joshua, with his people, now about dividing the conquered country, and to solicit their continuance in the east : All which was transacted in great order.

Then, prior to separating, the devout captain-general gave them a solemn charge : But take diligent heed, and so on. Phrases of like import are made use of, from pious zeal, attention and love. A fine group of ideas in so few words. Uniform social goodness is understood to be built upon right regular worship &c.

It was from Shiloh, where the tabernacle stood, that they were to take their leave, and not without pecuniary aid, verse 8, and various useful materials. Yet when they came unto the borders of Jordan, and built there an altar by the river side, on a rising ground, and beautified, as they were best able, from the spoils named verse 8 ; the children of Israel westward, became jealous, so as to meditate an instant war. What a mob seldom think of, the worthy leaders after named, did

devise, by way of amicable expedient. Come back with us to Shiloh, and worship.

Then obtained they a fair hearing, to the restoration of peace. God forbid that we should rebel, as has been apprehended, but rather to be a friendly witness between us and you, did we build an altar. A handsome, calm, and satisfying apology, verse 30. The chiefs render thanks to God for so healing a measure. Differences on religious accounts are, of every other, the most to be dreaded. Special prudence is then called for ^a.

XVII. JOSHUA'S DYING EXHORTATION.

Chap. xxiii. 2. *And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old and stricken in age.*

JOSHUA finding his strength to be much impaired, from fatigues of battle, and age together, called the elders or chiefs of the tribes together, to give them his last best counsels, verse 14. They were never to forget what the LORD God had done unto the idolatrous nations. All recent facts, and yet often ungratefully neglected. Where are the nine of ten, that did behave better?

He who had done so great things for them would soon enable them to conquer the few that remained ^b. All along, however, they were to beware of intermarrying with idolaters. It is good to walk with the wise, and them chiefly ^c. Pious bosom intimates are inestimable. The book of the law was to be familiarly consulted, with a view to practice ^d. Affection doth powerfully and sweetly constrain ^e.

An argument of terror must sometimes be used, as doth Joshua in the context, and whereof the Jews are a standing testimony.

^a 1 Tim. iii. 13, &c. ^b Psal. cxli. 3, 4.

^b Rom. viii. 32. ^c Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

^c Psal. i. 1, 2. ^d 2 Cor. vi. 14, &c.

^d Acts iii. 26. ^e Luke i. 78, &c. ^f 1 Jo. v. 3.

^e 2 Cor. v. 14, 15. ^f Gal. 2. 20.

XVIII. JOSHUA'S CHOICE.

Chap. xxiv. 15. *And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve ; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell : But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*

FOR a second time, and under clear presentiments of approaching death, Joshua did collect the chiefs of the Jewish nation, to give them his best counsel : First, with great wisdom abridging their history, and pointing out their numerous signal advantages : Also, renews the covenant, to enforce their obedience.

After this, by way of a striking rhetorical figure, he puts the choice in their power, what way they should henceforth take, whether to serve false deities, or the True ; and determining for himself and family, to abide by what was right ; a manner equally beautiful and affecting, with the people : God forbid that we should forsake the LORD, and so on. A purpose highly proper, and yet too often counteracted. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

The good example of a great ruler is an important blessing, especially in what belongs to religion. Sons of nobility should charge themselves with transmission of their excellences. Rational devotion will pay a steadfast regard to this, and perhaps no other principle can. A singular consolation among various public trials. How many immediate dependants must they affect ? How many victories produce ? Such are sure to begin with their own family or house ; for such is the method of every true believer ^a. So did Lydia, the jailor, and other converts.

There can be no right service without knowledge, which binds pious householders to due care. By far too many such are wanting. Both heart and mouth ought to be full of proper arguments, like upright Joshua's. How inexcusable, in

^a Psal. ci. 2, &c. Acts x. 1, &c.

professing Christians, to be unfamiliar with the short comprehensive life of our Blessed LORD : Likewise the other writings of his apostles ^a ?

People well instructed are left without excuse, if they degenerate, as having had just applications made to their several ages and circumstances ^b.

XIX. INCONSTANCY.

Chap. xxiv. 21. — *Nay, But we will serve the LORD.*

AN earnest and honest declaration this, from the chiefs, in name of their several tribes ; but soon, alas contradicted by facts, as foreseen by Joshua, and piously forewarned of. He would stir them up to perseverance, by difficulties to be encountered.

The resolution of the people was most wise at the time, verse 16, 17. How excellently do they reason ? So do many of ourselves occasionally : And yet do we find such always constant ? Far otherwise. How often is the design of gospel grace opposed ^c.

Means of 'preservation should be often and carefully reflected upon, as in verse 19. Inconstancy has manifold aggravations. God is holiness itself, and what must he think of deliberately contradicting this ? To do so wilfully is impious ingratitude, as well as absurd ^d. He is jealous of his honour, and ever upon clear grounds, therefore must be displeased. A preference of sin at any time, to his divine nature and authority, is monstrous in the transgressor ^e. Mere formality must be ruinous. On the other hand, the more like God, the more happy ^f.

Whilst time is given, there is hope. Yet none to obstinate impenitence ^g.

a Luke vii. 22. Heb. viii. 10. James ii. 5. Matth. xi. 25.
b Jo xv. 22, &c.---xii. 48. Isa. v. 1, &c. Prov. i. 24. &c. c Tit. ii. 11, &c.
Matth. xviii. 6. d 1 Thes. iv. 3, &c. Acts iii. 26. e Luke xii. 47.
Rom. ii. 6, &c. f Gal vi. 6, 7. g Jo iii. 19, &c. James i. 6, &c.
Eccl. xii. 13. 2 Cor. v. 19, &c.

XX. JOSHUA'S DYING COVENANT.

Chap. xxiv. 25. *So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem.*

HERE Joshua imitates his predecessor Moses ^a. Both were prophets, as well as captain-generals. Their ardour also rose, with the approach of death. Valuable patterns each ^b. Power given, and presence of mind, are still supposed. How stimulating are proofs of experienced virtue, piety, and comfort ! And all without a boast. Even godly grief is becoming, over infirmities. Grace and holy desires lead to a throne of mercy ^c.

Children, with intimates, and even servants, have claim to a pious dying exhortation. As much as possible keep by scripture words ^d.

Let peculiar dangers be well guarded against, as not so easy for youth to be aware of : In particular, from bad associates, verse 31 ^e.

P A R T VI.

J U D G E S.

I. ADONI-BEZEK.

Chap. i. 7. *And Adoni-bezek said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table : As I have done, so GOD hath requited me, And they brought him to Jerusalem, and there he died.*

THE tribes of Judah and Simeon did pursue Adoni-bezek, and caught him, and cut off his thumbs, and his

^a Exod. xxiv. 1, &c.

^b 2 Tim. iv. 6, &c. ² Pet. i. 12.

^c Matth. v. 6.

Heb. vi. 16, &c.

^d Jo. x. 27, &c.

Lu. i. 77, &c. Rom. viii. 32, &c.

Col. iii. 1, &c.

^e Psal. i. 1, &c.

great toes, to prevent either flight, or further use of arms, for some time : A mode of treating prisoners in war far from justifiable. Notwithstanding absurdly idolatrous as that prince was, he was able to read divine justice in his ignominy ; for thus he said, Threescore and ten kings, having their thumbs and great toes cut off, gathered their meat under my table.

Behold the hand of OMNIPOTENCE against cruel measures ^a. Slow lingering cruelties, are the most diabolical ^b. O my soul come not thou into their secret ; mine honour be not thou united to them ^c. Even the good are not always out of the reach of being tempted ^d. Wisdom is better than strength, and yet may cruelly be neglected ^e.

Respect not persons unduly ^f. This may be irreligious and cruel at once ^g. Sooner or later, such will be destroyed ^h. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting punishment.

II. BOCHIM.

Chap. ii. 4. *And it came to pass, when the angel of the LORD spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept.*

THE will of God often made known was, that the whole seven nations of Canaan should yield to Israel, whose, in gracious promise, their land was. Multiplied and horrible vices had also ripened for vengeance. Israel was to make no league with them, that might be hazardous to true faith and practice. Whatever did favour idolatrous worship was to be broken down.

Yet did not Israel abide by strict orders, from mercenary motives, and love of ease. Whence they made to themselves galling thorns and snares. For a while they stood in awe of heavenly words, so far as even to lift up their voice and weep.

^a Jam. ii. 13. ⁱ Thes. iv. 6. Col. iii. 25. Matth. vii. 2. Luke vi. 37.
^b Psal. vii. 14, 15. Ann. viii. 4. ^c Eccl. iv. 1. --- xxxiv. 21, 22. ^e 1st. x. 1, 2.
^d Hab. ii. 6. ^d 2 Sam. xii. 1, &c. ^e Eccl. ix. 14, 15. ^f Jam. ii. 1, &c.
^g Zech. vii. 9. ^h Psal. xxxvii. 1, &c.

Let foes themselves have their due. Yet so as to abide firm in belief, worship and virtue. Sloth, as to these, is highly criminal. In particular, where scepticism obtains, and youth are in danger. The learned should write, and the unlearned read with avidity; parents and other teachers likewise exerting themselves, especially upon the LORD's Day. How ungrateful to heaven are every other! They have no right to complain of an immoral multitude. What will they not do having impious superiors?

Open insult should be punished without respect of persons, and those under just suspicion inquired after, for premunition at least. How detestable are sacramental and other similar tests for civil offices? Likewise so are all contradictory vows. Patriot sympathy will not be forgotten ^a.

III. GOD'S ANGER AND PITY.

Chap. ii. 16. *Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.*

THE people of Israel, notwithstanding their manifold and great advantages, did frequently transgress, and that in opposition to solemn engagements. At times they even forsook the LORD GOD of their fathers, for absurd idol-worship. In part, this was owing to the heathens allowed to live among them, as appears from our context, and elsewhere ^b.

To walk with the wise and good is a prime security. Few but have had cause to lament their own carelessness. Unequal partnerships are ever hazardous. Guilt thus begun is ever apt to grow worse and worse. To overpower will would be to destroy religion ^c.

Whatever is truly pitiable, God will pity, as in the case of those uneducated. He doth not chide continually ^d. If such goodness be not improved, it is like treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath ^e. Relapses, in all cases, are peculiarly hazardous. So it is with nations as well as individuals.

^a Jer. xii. 1, &c.

^b Verse 19.

^c Verse 23.

^d Psal. ciii. 11, &c.

^e Prov. xxviii. 1. — i. 24, &c.

IV. DANGEROUS INTERMARRIAGES.

Chap. iii. 6. *And they took their daughters to be their wives, and gave their daughters to their sons, and served their gods.*

ONE of the most necessary things for youth to regard, if they would understand the Old Testament, is the nature of the Hebrew idiom. For example, how GOD is said to do what he only permits^f. Even where there may, and ought to be an interchange of good offices, vice must be guarded against. Likewise error and superstition.

By intermarrying with idolaters, many of Israel became worshippers of Baal. So it is still with libertines in principle and practice. All supposed Deities are merely fictitious, since the unity of nature demonstrates One Supreme. How could any corporeal being form a human soul? This last is more than the formation of the sun, moon, and stars. Yet was Israel often tempted to forget all, by intermarrying with Polytheists, contrary to clear law, and the express design of their whole ritual.

Even in Christian protestant countries, there are not wanting those who would destroy what is beneficial, without building what is better. How hideous, and how much to be withstood? Unbelievers court every mean possible for proselyting! Skilful experienced Robbers are they of human virtue and consolation, more to be dreaded than war itself, and want of bread together^z.

V. JUDGES OF ISRAEL.

Chap. iii. 10. *And the spirit of the LORD came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war: and the LORD delivered Chushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia into his hand; and his hand prevailed against Chushan-rishathaim.*

GOD, for a long while, was Supreme Governor of Israel, by miraculous responses from the tabernacle. After

^f Jam. i. 14.

^g 2 Cor. vi. 16.

their

their establishment in the land of Canaan, civil affairs were put more visibly in the hands of human judges, whose history is very short, and in many places obscure. Those who happen to differ should make allowance for both.

At the beginning, the LORD himself did determine chiefly their election ^a. Obvious great talents and endowments were afterwards to be consulted. The office was too arduous for a mere popular suffrage. Whence God might still be understood to raise them up.

Their duties were to rule with equity at home, and to lead forth armies. In each case, the Mosaic law was to be their standard ^b. So did Samuel.

Councils they had it in their power to call ^c, according to the charge given them, so did God assist. Great respect is due to civil government ^d. No countenance, in scripture, is given to arbitrary rule ^e. They are, or ought to be as in God's stead to men, and therefore styled gods ^f. How much do the well governed owe, both to the ALMIGHTY, and his faithful ministers ^g.

VI. EHUD AND SHAMGAR.

Chap. iii. 28. *And he said unto them, Follow after me; for the LORD hath delivered your enemies the Moabites into your hand.*

THE History of Israel's judges has been most wisely a-bridged, as containing less than other scriptures of what is practical, though in some particulars singular. Human passions too may be affectingly seen in a number of them.

Ehud appears to have been both artful and heroic towards Eglon, king of Moab. Yet can we not vindicate a treacherous murder, even in war. The provocation may be seen from verse 13. Ehud follows his own vengeful impulse, and executes it with criminal subtilty. A dagger, though long, could

^a Chap. ii. 16.—iii. 10.

^b Chap. iv. 4.

^c Chap. vi. 14.—xiii. 5.

^d Rom. xiii. 1, &c. 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.

^e Chap. ii. 18.—iii. 10.

^f Psal. lxxxii.

^g Deut. i. from verse 16.

easily be concealed under an upper plaid. He affects having forgot somewhat of moment, and acts perfidiously, from a religious pretext too. He makes his escape in a way that does honour to his judgement and presence of mind. Both great soldierly qualities.

By a trumpet of fame, he summons his people together, to hear what he had done, and give further orders. His voice was that of war, and his readiness to lead them on to sure victory over an idolatrous foe. He would seem to have believed, that what he had done was under a divine impulse. Yet ambition and spoil might be at bottom. For certain, blood was saved to Israel, whilst their foe hitherto was utterly overthrown. Incursions, and tribute they had not now to fear.

What Shamgar had done to the Philistines did render their peace complete. Hence appears the wisdom of God, in permitting the above. A sincere cry of national penitence is sure to be heard in the end. Measures taken in ancient times are no rule, since many circumstances now may be unknown; and men by the gospel are much improved. Justice and charity will ever allow for great provocations. Truth unviolated is highly honourable itself in war. Valour, crowned with success, has a right to say, follow me; let us conquer or die. An host thus orderly led on, will ever maintain their ground with honour. Happy they, who, in all hazardous cases, have their eyes to God.

VII. DEBORAH AND BARAK.

Chap. iv. 8, 9. *And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go. And she said, I will surely go with thee: notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the LORD shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman. And Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh.*

IT was the custom of Israel's judges, to pass through the different tribes, to see that order was kept ^h. In a dwelling

g Verse 12.

h Sam. vii. 15.

of her own the prophetess Deborah did live, the wife of Lapidoth ^a. She occasionally kept courts for judgement. Thither she called Barak, by a special divine order, for public service ^b. Tabor Mount was to be the place of meeting his men, where was a large plain on the top, and another at no great distance.

There would he successfully combat Jabin's great army. For a while Barak's faith seems to have been at a stand, from the number of his enemies' chariots and horses, but is soon made strong ^b. The prophetess engaging to go with him. Her fidelity was admirable. A woman's honour in this service was to eclipse that of Barak. Sisera, Jabin's captain-general, having got information where Israel had encamped, did think to surprise, and easily cut them off.

Up, said Deborah, this is the day wherein the LORD hath delivered Sisera into thine hand. So Barak, and his men, went down from the Mount, and made an easy conquest of those who thought themselves secure: their General Sisera flying on foot. The discomfiture was dreadful. Their leader fled to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite; who gave him kindly words, saying, turn in, my Lord, and fear not. She gave him refreshment, with a bed, and covering answerable to his fatigue. After all, when fallen asleep, she put him to death. The method thereof was cruel, and it may be, not premeditated; yet doth it fill us with horror. Her own, and her husband's safety, who had been at peace with Jabin, might move to the deed. Altogether unfemale, next to wiful murder.

From what was thus permitted, good came to Israel, and a foresight of the whole so wonderful, could not fail to extend the knowledge of their God. Mysteries of providence, at the time, ought ever to be revered, as what may prove beneficial in the end. War is a heavy national judgement, and calls for penitence.

^a Verse 4.

^b Chap. v. 14, 15.

^c Heb. xi. 32.

VIII. DEBORAH'S SONG.

- Chap. v. 2. *Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.*

THUS begins the song of Deborah, upon the last signal victory, wherein the opponents were numerous, war-like, strong ^a. The sublimities by way of comment are not to be equalled, but the pious and moral sentiments are of great use.

The victors did offer themselves with humble penitence ^b, and thus went upon difficult duty. Devout heroism! National leaders above every other ought to exemplify praise for success, whilst instruments of God, at the same time, are duly honoured.

When war has been of long continuance, and situation thereby rendered most critical, former kindnesses of providence should be considered ^c. Earth, heaven and clouds, as it were, all dropped to cheer Israel then. Mountains of pride too, melted before the conducting LORD. Matters before this often came to a sad crisis ^d. Troubles without, and ungrateful murmurs at home. A stimulus to devout heroism like that of Deborah and Barak.

IX. GIDEON.

- Chap. vi. 12. *And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valour.*

IN the time of the judges, Israel did often relapse into idolatry, notwithstanding of manifold religious advantages. The glare of externals did captivate their childish minds ^e. Though often corrected, yet always in measure, and with new offers of mercy. And the angel said unto Gideon, the LORD God is with thee, &c.

In return, Gideon, as yet supposing him no more than a

^a Verse 28, &c. Chap. iv. 6, &c. ^b Chap. iv. 3. ^c Verse 4, &c.
^d Verse 6. ^e Chap. viii. 26.

devout man, modestly and affectionately expostulates, why then has all this befallen us, &c. ? It is only if need be that God afflicts, and there was, for certain, such need at present. The best of people however, are dull at times. The angel pities, and says, go in thy might, and thou shalt save Israel. Know, I have sent thee by divine appointment to overthrow the invading Midianites ^a. Their multitudes were prodigious, and likewise their strong-holds. Hence Israel did cry for mercy and found it ^b. The matter to Gideon was of special moment as well as hazardous, and did require evidence.

The method of arguing was just and lowly, and therefore had assurances renewed ^c. Shew me a sign, and so on. Depart not, at all events till thou art properly refreshed, to which the messenger of God consents. Gideon is pious, with good understanding. He is also agreeably courteous.

What provision was brought forth, Fire from the rock did miraculously consume, and then the angel departed. An awful scene and most convincing ^d. Alas, O LORD, I have seen what I am not likely to outlive ! But a voice of peace he instantly hears. Then Gideon built an altar to the LORD, and called it Jehovah-Shallum, the LORD send peace. The altar of Baal is cast down, which gave Gideon a noble opportunity of exposing the irritated idolaters. Afterwards he put himself in good condition to fight, and make use of stratagems with admirable success ^e. Nations need not to be afraid, while they abide by true worship and regular morals.

X. JOTHAM'S PARABLE.

Chap. ix. 15. *And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow ; and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon.*

BOTH for excellence of composition, and prophetic design, this parable has been admired, through all ages.

^a Verse 1.

^b Verse 8.

^c Verse 17, 18.

^d Verse 22.

^e Chapters vii. and viii. are very curious.

In the zeal of Israel's gratitude, they said unto Gideon ^a, rule thou over us, and so on : To which he nobly returned his negative. The LORD JEHOVAH himself shall rule you, as in time past.

After his death, notwithstanding, Abimelech, one of his sons, conspired with the Shechemites, to murder the rest of his brethren, and to usurp the throne. He with money from a heathen temple, did hire multitudes of base men to follow him, and after so detestable a manner, to proclaim him king.

Jotham, the youngest son of Gideon, called also Jerubbaal, having made his escape from the unnatural slaughter, went, as would seem, under a pious impulse, to the top of Mount Gerizzim, with as many as he could get, and lift up his voice, and cried for succour in their hearing ; and that in the form of a parable, according to eastern manner. The whole impressive, and to clear up gradually. Such were also many of our Blessed LORD's prophetic parables.

Verse 8, 'The trees went forth, &c. The olive did probably mean Gideon. The fig is next applied to, a plentiful producer likewise, representing the best sons of Gideon. A fine oblique hint is given by the answer, to Abimelech's vile and fraudulent arts. Next comes the vine, and by no means despicable neither, as cheerful in its produce, to both nobles and inferiors, signifying other good sons. Last of all, the bramble, rough, surly, pestive ; quite an Abimelech. Unhesitating to aspire by every hold. How ridiculous a speech is here made ! If not defensive in one way, they will make thousands wretched.

The direct prophetic application may be understood from verse 16. The truth of this prediction is held forth by our whole chapter : At once mournful and instructive, completed by the miserable death of an infamous usurper. A warning to all future ages. An indirect method of arguing is sometimes the most efficacious, but requires much good sense and pains. Esop's fables, Phedrus', and Gay's, may be studied with great advantage. Above them all, the parables in God's word.

XI. NATIONAL REPENTANCE.

Chap. x. 15. *And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned : Do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee ; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.*

FOR more than forty years, under two excellent active judges, Tola, and Jair, the children of Israel had peace ; but ease and prosperity did corrupt them ^a. Being full, they forgot God, and did evil again and again, in his sight, so as to worship idols. Mark the context well.

Whence, the anger of the LORD, speaking after the manner of men, waxed hot against them. They were sorely and justly punished. The very nations whom they did impiously imitate, did harass them, verse 10. At last, God pities their amendment, upon reasonable motives. They now discover a true sense of guilt, a willingness to be humbled ; and only beg an immediate respite from what could not well be any longer borne, verse 8.

Space, therefore, is allowed them to justify the truth of what they had professed. The LORD did act towards them, like one grieved for their affliction. The aggravating circumstances of sin should not be overlooked, to feel the power of demerit. To forsake true and regular worship is the sure road to most other crimes, such as frauds, injustices, pride and cruel domination. When under covenant with the ALMIGHTY, how enormous ! Submission to chastisement is hopeful. The rod is seen as in a father's hand : Only cast us not off as a people. Take not religious and civil freedom from us. A respite from what is oppressive is encouraging to further obedience and trust : yet is too often soon forgot. Hence comes the most awful tokens of divine displeasure. To present penitence, certain gracious engagements are made ^b. God never can want instruments for saving.

^a Ezek. xlix. 16.

^b Chap. xi.

XII. JEPHTHAH.

Chap. xi. 30. *And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands.*

UNDER the law, besides what were appointed, gifts were sometimes occasionally made by vows ^c. Such were resolutions deliberately formed, in times of difficulty, to offer as a thanksgiving. Not to perform was understood as impious ^d. From not attending to qualifications, the vow of Jephthah has been much mistaken by some; even by Josephus. Neither unclean, nor inhuman sacrifices did the law permit. These were redeemable with money.

Verse 39, explains Jephthah's vow of his daughter's not marrying; compare verse 36, and admire her magnanimous patriotism. It would seem that Jephthah's mother was neither of high rank, nor very scrupulous. This he could not help in early life; and the times then were not so enlightened as ours. His brethren, more lawfully born, did envy his valour, which from peace's sake, obliged him to fly. Itself a mark of manhood. They are all threatened with an invasion by the children of Ammon, when the elders of Israel became sensible of Jephthah's worth, and invite him to head their army, verse 7. His expostulation is mild and prudent, yet he accepts.

First, he sends messengers of peace to the enemy, who gave him no proper satisfaction. He renews the embassy, to prevent shedding of blood, but in vain. Then refers the cause to GOD, piously recognizing his former goodness. Under such an impulse, he proceeds very nigh to the foe, and makes his vow to heaven.

He is no less devout than brave, yet part only of his words may be set down. Infidel wit may carp, but the candid will admire. So he made a complete conquest, and returning home from the field of honour, to his house at Mizpah, is first

^c Lev. xxiii. 38.

^d Deut. xxiii. 21, &c. Lev. xxvii. throughout

met by his pious daughter, full of transport, his only child. When he saw her so happy, recollecting his vow, he rent his clothes in grief. Alas, my daughter, &c. He had opened his mouth unto the LORD, and could not draw back. A magnanimous hero, and thus situated, is affecting! He now sees his only hope as to issue, spending her life in upright pious virginity. And being of age, she encourages her father to fulfil, verse 36: What an example of religion, fortitude, and filial love! Such an one, out of patriotic fervent mistake, could have parted with life. The whole is soon, and much more comfortably explained, verse 37, &c. From that time forward, a public spirit prevailed, though mixed with superstition.

XII. THE EPHRAIMITES.

Chap. xii. 1. *And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? We will burn thine house upon thee with fire.*

SIGNAL benefits are not only forgotten in time; but sometimes, out of envy, maliciously misrepresented. So was Jephthah treated by the Ephraimites, after opposing successfully a tremendous invasion. They threaten, from a pretence of having been neglected, to burn his house upon him. Dreadful ^a! By a soft answer, he, as Gideon, did attempt to soothe them, verse 2 and 3. He had hazarded all, as a bird in the hand for them, and ascribes his success to JEHOVAH alone ^b.

Sweetly mild, and yet cutting is his speech. Fewer of the brave perish in war, than of the timid. After judging Israel six years, Jephthah died, under savoury remembrance, and was buried in one of his own cities. From what he had done, both public peace, and other advantages did follow for seven years. With the balm of a good reputation, Ibzar of Beth-

^a Chap. viii. 1.

^b Chap. xi. 29, 30.

lehem also died, and left his remains there. A like peaceful successor was Elon the Zebulonite for ten years, and the whole much owing to Jephthah's fame. Abdon, after this, acquired great wealth, so as to ride in state, for other eight years. A large space taking all together.

Admire the calm hero, and how beneficial his example was. Counsel as well as courage are with those of a cool or excellent spirit. Beware of envy, the rottenness of the bones, and not the easiest passion to subdue ^a. The Shibboleths of a party have been often ruinous, as well religious as civil.

XIII. MANOAH AND HIS WIFE.

Chap. xiii. 8. *Then Manoah entreated the LORD, and said, O my Lord, let the man of GOD which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*

AMONG sacred officers in the Jewish nation were Nazarites, who, for most part, did consecrate themselves, by solemn vow ^b. Such rules they were strictly to observe, so long as their vow did bind them. Certain of these were engaged from the womb, as in verse 5; and to them great promises were frequently made, as in the case of SAMPSON. The probable grounds for such regulations are difficult to find out, and not now very edifying. A promise of the above kind is made to the wife of Manoah, who as yet had no child.

When Manoah's wife received the above intimation, and that her son was to be one, who should begin to deliver Israel; the angel did instruct her, to bring him up a complete Nazarite. Now therefore beware, and so on. Manoah her husband was made early acquainted with so clear and express an appointment, verse 6. She also describes to him the angelic appearance.

Manoah himself entreats from heaven an interview with the same, for strengthening his faith, and subsequent obedience; and was heard. Now, let thy words come to pass, &c. He

^a James iv. 5.

^b Num. vi. 1, &c.

is full of parental concern about educating, and was similarly answered, as his wife had been. She would have had the messenger of the LORD to eat, which he declined; and directs her to honour the ALMIGHTY with a burnt-offering, and conceals even his name. So Manoah did worship the One Only LORD GOD; his wife looking on. With the flame, probably kindled out of the rock, did the angel ascend, as in a chariot. No wonder both witnesses to this fell prostrate.

The common opinion was, that such could not long survive a sight of this sort. We shall surely die, said Manoah to his wife, having thus seen GOD in effect. The woman's return had more good sense in it, and unanswerable. Thus are we brought to the birth of Samson, afterwards great as a judge and warrior in Israel; yet not a little sullied with vice.

It is the glory of scripture narrative to be strictly true. Great men's wrongs are not approved, nor ought any to defend them ^a. The motive is what GOD accepts ^b. Peace and charity are inestimable benefits; yet not to be purchased by uncertain measures, as to rectitude ^c.

XIV. SAMSON.

Chap. xiv. 6. *And the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon him, and he rent him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand: But he told not his father or his mother what he had done.*

THE Spirit of the LORD did only move the judges of Israel upon certain great occasions, as appears from chap. xiii. 25. and that not always in its saving effects ^d. Some of them did manifest strong, unwarrantable passions; and few of them more than Samson.

Even these, however, were usually overruled for good to Israel, and to punish idolaters. The truth of Jewish history may be inferred from the above, and at this distance of time,

^a Acts xviii. 18.

^b Acts xxi. 23.

^c Heb. xii. 14. Gal. ii. 2. Prov. ii. 1, &c.

^d Gal. v. 22, &c.

renders the explanation, in different parts, difficult. There is much room left for conjecture.

By an impulse of heaven, Samson did conquer a raging lion, and tear it to pieces like a kid. A prelude to what was still greater, and kept upon record, probably for sake of the riddle after-mentioned.

At Timnath, he fell in love with one of the daughters of the Philistines; quite an improper connexion, verse 3, and much to his hurt. She pleases me well, said he; or, agreeable to the margin, is right in mine eyes. A clear mark of his undutifulness, and impiety together, verse 8. In his way to bring her home, curiosity led him to view the carcass of the lion, in which he found a swarm of bees and honey; part of which last he took and did eat of, and part afterwards gave to his father and mother, concealing how he came by it.

While marriage entertainment was coming on, he put forth a riddle, or guessing tale, to promote mirth, and seven days for unfolding it in, with a handsome promise to the first who should succeed. The riddle was "out of the eater came there meat, and out of the strong came sweetness." After three days, there was no satisfactory exposition given. On the seventh day they did tamper with his wife to get it from himself; which she did, and he soon found out.

Female art, and want of principle together, did extort the secret; an early proof of disadvantage from his improper marriage.

What, said they, is sweeter than honey, and stronger than a lion? He easily saw how they came by this, and yet did he not profit as he should have done, by such a lesson; though his breast at the time did boil with revenge, which he took in a manner far from vindicable; then left them for his father's house soon after; when his faithless companion was given to another.

In reason, he ought to have abandoned her quite. But youthful and rash, he still continues to love, and after a while he would have her from the father, who would not hearken to his demand. The scheme of resentment devised by him

was singular, and hardly, if at all defensible, by setting fire to their fields of corn. The creatures made use of, are termed Foxes; but may apply, as properly to Thoes, which go in herds, and which had lighted brands put between them. What a havock would three hundred such make in a short time, when scattered by his servants into different quarters? A cruel angry sport upon the whole. How wide and sad often are the desolations made by vice! All begun in erroneous love.

Mount Elam after this he chose for his residence, and was pursued thither, by some thousands of Philistines; being treacherously bound at the same time. These new cords, he easily burst asunder, and with the jaw-bone of an ass, did slay all who stood in his way. A permission of heaven, unquestionably to open the eyes of an idolatrous people. In weariness and thirst, he cried to the LORD, and was delivered.

Then in peace he judged Israel twenty years. After all, again, this man of valour, and some piety too, becomes the prey of an harlot. Singularly mixed character! And no less astonishing inconstant Israel.

XV. SAMSON'S DEATH.

Chap. xvi. 5. *And the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and said unto her, Entice him, and see wherein his great strength lieth, and by what means we may prevail against him that we may bind him to afflict him; and we will give thee, every one of us, eleven hundred pieces of silver.*

LET those who read the history of Samson abhor fleshly lusts^a. Many young and strong both have been ruined by them. There are those whose hearts are snares, and their hands bonds. How much blood-shed did Samson's irregular marriage cost!

Once more, he is caught with beauty, regardless of any thing else; even Delilah, an infamous courtesan. Hence he first loses his eyes, and then his life. The whole may be

read and easily understood. Gold is what the lewd are oftenest overcome by. The harlot succeeds in her turn^a. So the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza; where, in a prison-house, he did grind as a slave. Dreadful reverse of circumstances!

Then the Philistines think of a new sport, which does not well bear to be commented upon: They will have him by force, to honour their idol-god Dagon, said to be half fish downwards, and upwards human^b. Melancholy abject ideas! Let Christians be thankful.

In the madness of their mirth, the mob call for Samson, to crown their revels. Cowards are ever cruel. The whole weight of their house seems to have rested upon two pillars; between which Samson was put, and harassed for diversion. Indignant, and now conscious of growing strength, he conceives a terrible revenge, in which his own life was to go with those of his enemies.

Death he did deserve, for shewing such a bad example in advanced life, and no less did the idolaters. The love of his country, in the main, seems to have been pre-eminent still. And having got leave to lean upon the two pillars, he prays, and is heard. O God, do thou now avenge me, and so on. All is devoutly put into the hand of Sovereign justice, with unquestionable due submission. With leave given, the whole company are buried under ruins. Tremendous overthrow, verse 27.

His remains, it would appear, were easily distinguished; and laid between Zorah and Eshtaol, in his father's own sepulchre.

At the same time that Samson was brave, he took every proper method of disheartening his enemies; as by carrying away the gates of Gaza, instead of breaking them in pieces. With all the advantages of natural strength, he still trusted in God. The impure of either sex, are apt to be mercenary. Secrets of consequence are only safe among tried friends. Opportunity to reveal what should be concealed is base. How deplorable a thing is it to forsake God.

^a Hos. iv. 11.

^b 1 Sam. v. 4.

XVI. MICAH.

Chap. xvii. 6. *In those days there was no king in Israel; but every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*

THE word king here seems to be put for governor; and to be without one is truly deplorable, for then mere strength and will must rule. Micah, for some time lived at distance from Shiloh, the appointed place for Jewish religious solemnities, and recollecting certain parts of the high-priest's dress, and being informed that his mother had, in her own mind, devoted a large sum of money to a pious use, he first stole it, and afterwards made restoration to the full. It seems however to have been idolatrously applied, and to commence an evil which did not altogether terminate, but by the Babylonish captivity.

Perhaps this may be the best account that can be given, for so large a narrative as to one private family. Had Shiloh been of easier access, likely Micah and his mother would have been more strictly attached to legal prescription. Absenting longer than needful, they would devise a method of their own and use every sectarian art for seducing others to mere will-worship.

They go on to innovate still further, by employing a founder, at no small expence to make them graven images, verse 5th. A house of gods, with Ephod and Teraphim, high-priest like. Then consecrate a son of the family to act. They intend not an utter exclusion of worship from the LORD JEHOVAH, but would take their own way. How hazardous, how fatal in the issue? So was the gospel itself in early ages corrupted. Adherence to scripture simplicity has ever been the best preservative. Let God judge for us all what is most decent and useful.

A young man from secular motives, and unmindful of his Levite-duty, becomes prophane. One evil step leads to another. Dignifying places and wealth often ensnare. Micah, in the end, deceives himself with the hope of good, even from

f Jo. iv. 23, 24.

offended divine Majesty, nor did the secularized priest contradict him, placing more to the account of mere externals than pure inward devotion ^w.

In place of good, God sends, or allows the Danites to punish the guilt of Micah. Even hospitable rights were then forgotten, whilst they are superstitiously awed. The love of money overcomes all, both with Danites and priest. Dreadful state ! No king !

XVII. THE LEVITE OF BETHLEHEM.

Chap. xix. 16. *And behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even, which was also of Mount Ephraim ; and he sojourned in Gibeah ; but the men of the place were Benjamites.*

JEWISH Levites had more leave to travel abroad than other priests. The one here spoken of had married a wife from about Mount Ephraim, where for some time she chose to abide. Yet duty and ease would not suffer this long ^x.

Hoping the best of his Ephraimite wife ; some things in her conduct are difficult to explain, others far from unpleasant.

Our oldest Greek translation of verse 2d, would seem to import worse than mere fickleness, from parental indulgence. The husband arose and went after her, would seem to take off all suspicion of gross crime. Her behaviour, at sight of him, is very affectionate, and so is the father's welcome. He invites him after three days to a longer cheering stay. He had the heart both of a true parent and landlord. Be content, I pray thee, and let us continue to be merry. This once more he repeats with a new grappling argument ; and still he persists.

Upon the last of these occasions, he keeps his guests till toward sun-set, and is furnished with another cause for their lodging : at least one night more my son, run not any risks.

At length the man of God would not, perhaps could not

^w Micah vi. 6, &c.

^x Num. iii. from verse 5.

tarry; full of both friendship and piety^d. He rose up early, and so on. He came to Jebus, afterwards named Jerusalem; then savage and idolatrous. Their servant beseeches them to turn in to the city, which from their character was not to be rashly yielded to. The master would prefer Rama, or Gibeah, at no great distance, the rest it is probable, consenting. Here we meet with a strange mixture of circumstances. They do better to be read in private, than rehearsed.

At sun-set, our travellers sought the streets, for then inns were not common; no man for a good while taking them into his house.

At length there came an old man from his work, which by kind providence, was also of Ephraim. As sojourners each, they mutually felt, and furnish a good lesson, upon the same principle, to pity, and relieve. So the old man lifting up his eyes from under a burden, saw one of their number, and spoke excellently well to him. One sweet mark of a hospitable temper^e. He urges them all, by the arguments of provender, straw, bread and wine, wishing them peace, or all manner of happiness. Let all thy wants lie upon me. Only for love's sake lodge not in the streets.

See the rising excellences of pure genuine affection! So he brought the Levite, with all his company in, nor was he unmindful of their carriage-beasts. He did not simply feed, but refresh the whole. A state of happiness, however, too sweet for the devil and emissaries to bear. Base night-watchers regard neither age nor sex. The hospitable roof is beset, and demands too shocking made to be uttered. The Levite's wife died, not as a harlot-brute, but I trust like a true martyr-struggling-heroine. Dreadful to think of! If beauty and indulgence had hurt her before, we may hope that long ere now, she had penitently felt her wrong. For such, there is a true asylum, in forgiving grace^f.

d Verse 10.

e Compare Luke x. 37, &c.

lv. 1, &c. Matth. xi. 28.

[f Isa lvii. 15——

XVIII. GOVERNMENT.

Chap. xxi. 5. *And the children of Israel said, Who is there among all the tribes of Israel that came not up with the congregation unto the LORD? For they had made a great oath concerning him that came not up to the LORD to Mizpeh, saying, He shall surely be put to death.*

SUPREME governors may be termed kings, from their authority, as Moses, Joshua, and the elders of Israel. At this time they had next to no settled rule at all, which issued in very shocking crimes. The infamous murder of the Levite's wife was not avenged, and if so, what worse, if worse was possible, might not be done? A curse of sensual appetite let loose is worse than brutish, base, and cruel.

Where there is no ultimate appeal stratagems must be used, which may vindicate the use made of a dead murdered body. It was a scheme for popular retaliation, and did succeed. Each tribe, as one man, took fire at the narrative ^c. We will instantly go up, and so on. Here was zeal indeed, but too unguarded, too bitter, as involving the good with the bad. They consult not God, and were punished. They likewise swore rashly to what they found reason to grieve for. Slaying the males of Jabesh-Gilead, they kept the females for wives. What miseries, from want of regular government ^f. Unvindicable. Thus did the children of Benjamin ^g, adding rapine to cruelty. All overruled to maintain the rights of inheritance. O the depths of divine wisdom and knowledge! How unsearchable are his judgements ^h!

Prize the freedom of government ⁱ. Limited monarchy seems to be of all constitutions the best. Meddle not with those who are given to change.

^c Chap. xx. 8.

^f Chap. xxi. 19.

^g Verse 23.

^h Hos. iv. 11.

ⁱ Pet. ii. 11.

ⁱ Gal. v. 13. Rom. xiii. 1, &c. ⁱ Tim. ii. 1, &c.

RUTH.

XIX. RUTH'S PIOUS FRIENDSHIP.

Chap. i. 16. *And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy GOD my GOD.*

IT seems probable that this sacred book was written by Samuel, the last of the Jewish judges, and connects well with what follows. In substance we are told, that there was a famine in the land of Canaan, which obliged Elimelech, a person of note, in the city of Beth-lehem, so named from the fruitful country around, to sojourn from thence, to that of the Moabites, with his family. *Mahlon and Chilion* were the names of his two sons. All, save his wife Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, soon died in Moab. Orpah and Ruth were their names. The widow thought of returning home when the famine was over, and her daughters-in-law did set out with her. She urges them to part with singular tenderness, verse 8. This was a sore trial to their affection, and they insist for a while to abide with her. The mother argues powerfully upon the side of what she took to be their interest, and agreeable to the law of Moses. Orpah is persuaded, being the eldest probably, but Ruth clave unto her, saying, intreat me not, and so on. Nothing but death shall separate us. And clear piety was at the bottom of this friendship, the sublime of what is best therein.

She is a proselyte to true religion, whereas Orpah, it would seem, had not so profited. Thus in one family there may be different degrees of understanding and candour, or not the same measure of instruction. Yet as even infidels improve by the gospel, so might Orpah have done by her mother's good lessons, though not an entire convert. Ruth's better choice
was

was pure and lasting. Blessed relative ^a, and no less blessed prospect ^b.

Only mutual religious attachment can go the length of Ruth's. Momentary sensualism, and regard to filthy lucre, can have no such experience. In families themselves the delicate operations of friendship may cease. Friends ever are friendly. They are willing to share in every common hazard, as well as duty. Faithful too 'are the wounds of a friend, when need is. Words of devout friendship stop all remonstrances. Call me not Naomi the pleasant, but Mara the bitter; argues a great change both of looks and circumstances. Weep at heart over this. A friend like Ruth was made for such a day of adversity.

Often joy, as in the present case, is nigh to the bitterness of suffering ^c. Devout friends are rarely, if ever, forsaken. Yet is this but little understood.

XX. RUTH AND BOAZ.

Chap. ii. 2. *And Ruth, the Moabitess, said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.*

BY happy marriage connections, under GOD, Ruth, the Moabitess, became a complete convert to the belief of One only living and true GOD. Hence, through time, she would become familiar with the law of Moses. In harvest, as at present, scanty morsels were to be left for the poor. The probable garb of widowhood would make her attended to, as an off-set to her natural beauty. Normight she be here conscious of this, when she spoke as in the text. The mother said, go, and so forth. Modesty too has charms peculiar.

Boaz, upon inquiry, did charge his servants to drop somewhat from their sheaves, whilst he spake courteously to Ruth. Her return was suitably graceful, as became a stranger, and poor. Humble industry is yet further encouraged by accounts given of her to Boaz. Religion and poverty together,

^a Mal. iii. 16.

^b Dan. xii. 3. ^r Thess. ii. 19.

^c Psal. cxxvi. 2, 5, 6.

by the death of a young husband, did much endear her. She is all along piously grateful. At meal times of the reapers, he instructs them as formerly to take her in among them.

The servants themselves are affected by her bashfulness, and help her. Still Ruth's leave to glean is enlarged by the good master. Reproach her not, said he, but rather let fall some handfulls. So she gleaned until evening, and did prepare of it to her mother, for five days successively. Naomi blesses in her daughter's hearing the bounteous landlord, and conceiving more than she chose all at once to impart, gives new directions.

The name Boaz reminds Naomi of a nigh relation subsisting between them. Whilst suitably guarding against either violences, or just grounds for suspicion, Naomi puts Ruth upon what was agreeable to law, but has often been cavilled at, through mere ignorance. The passage should be thought of with candour. Wash thyself, and so on. Ruth's position at first was not to be that of an equal, but rather like that of a suppliant. Thus did she agreeable to instruction. Boaz is surprised in the morning, and was soon convinced of the truth; and that what she had done, was vindicable by law of inheritance, mortgaged from necessity, and for a space.

The coverlet she did only use as an emblematical marriage sign. Both were pious, both modest, and none of them quite young. The whole ended to Naomi's wish, and Ruth's legal right. In other circumstances, there could have been no apology. One nearer kinsman Boaz recollects, and gave him the proffer, which was refused; so that by magistratical appointment, Ruth was his. Soon after marriage, she became mother of Obed ^a, who was the father of Jesse, &c. Thus, by way of figure, uniting the true Church of God, with a Gentile by nature. Prophetical in some sort ^b.

^a Chap. iv. 22.

^b Eph. ii. 18, &c.

I. S A M U E L.

XXI. HANNAH.

Chap. i. 15. *And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord : I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit : I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD.*

THUS spake Hannah, soon after the mother of Samuel, the renowned prophet. Though long married before this she had no child, which gave her great concern. The more that there was temporary allowance in those early ages, for one man to have different wives at once, for preventing worse, but which did contradict one prime purpose of marriage. Strife and envying among the females did often ensue.

So it was in the house of Elkanah, first of all husband to her whom our text doth name. She was hated by a second, who had children, and who did insult her. This led to a dejection of spirits not quite vindicable neither, since such, for a while, was the ordained will of heaven, whose heritage the fruits of honourable marriage are. Her situation, however, was to be pitied.

Coming with the rest of the family, from Ephraim to Shiloh, on a solemn occasion for public worship, Peninah, the second wife of Elkanah, in a spirit quite the reverse of what was devout, did cruelly provoke her superior, even according to the custom of those times ^k. Nor was it unrepeatd ; and therefore, the more embittering. Hannah wept, and did not eat, which could not pass unobserved by her affectionate husband, who said unto her, Am not I unto thee, in love, even as ten sons ?

So, after the sacrifice of peace-offering was over in which what remained of the LORD JEHOVAH's due, was eaten in, or nigh to the place of worship ; Hannah rose up to pray, but aside, that she might not, if possible, be taken notice of ; being as yet in bitterness of soul, and weeping. At this time she

vowed a vow unto the LORD, it may be under a divine impulse, which was truly fervent. It was, in substance, to be remembered as a mother. The style was varied, as is in the very nature of earnestness, and is in such cases true eloquence. Her son, if she met with acceptance, was to be freely and entirely devoted to God.

A mode of petitioning, perhaps not fit to be imitated, unless when under a like special divine movement. Here our devout female is met with a new trial; for Eli, the officiating priest, observing only her lips move, rashly supposes her to have been drunk, by what she had taken of liquor, at the family-sacrifice, and said so to herself, in direct and cutting terms: Put away thy wine from thee, and so on. Cruel haste upon his part, and yet most mildly answered: No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit, and have not so much as tasted any thing like what you have spoken of. Ah, count not thy daughter for a hand-maid of Belial, the evil one, or adversary; more largely explained in the following clauses.

Then Eli overcome with her soft manner, and now clear signs of distress, answered and said, Go in peace, and God grant thee thy petition! She begs thus to be continued in his favour, by prayer. O man of God, be thou an intercessor for me! The woman then went away, relieved in her spirits, and did eat.

Upon the above, remark, that from what is visible, there can be no certain determination as to those whom God doth either love or hate. Some of the worst at times, prosper outwardly; and some of the best, for wise reasons, suffer many and great trials. If so under the Mosaic, still more under a pure spiritual gospel dispensation.

Let Christians be thankful, that they live as when the marriage state was instituted, pure, honourable, and uniting. That which was from the first is now most happily restored; the highest sweetest bond of friendship. Parents and children should stimulate to love.

While troubles are continued, there is no such relief as from devotion².

^a Psal. l. 23. Eccl. vii. 14. Jam. v. 13. Heb. xii. 7, &c.

Being all of us sojourners and pilgrims, it is foolish to differ on trivial accounts. But to wound a sorrowful heart, with our knowledge, is quite diabolical. As most persons and things wear a double aspect, we should always conceive that which is most favourable. Eli, from want of this, was a real transgressor ^a.

XXI. ELKANAH.

Chap. i. 23. *And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good : Tarry until thou have weaned him ; only the LORD establish his word. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.*

CULTIVATED minds are ever most tender, and love to hear of agreeable things. It is the common result of a pure enlightened piety, and such an one was Elkanah. Though living at a distance from Shiloh, he did annually travel thither, agreeable to divine order, for public worship. He would have gladly taken Hannah along with him ; but, in great wisdom at present, she prefers mercy to sacrifice. Her duty to an infant son did demand prime care.

Elkanah is quite satisfied : And who would not ? The good LORD in mercy establish to us what he has so well begun. So the pious woman did suckle and wean her child. An amiable pattern ! A sweet agreement of mind, and happy couple ! As much as possible, this should be sought after, especially in matters of moment. A docile temper can never be wilful or dogmatical ^b. Matters of faith, in Christian countries, do rarely differ married people, like those of mere opinion ^c. Mutual love, and upon religious principles, must ever be blessed. A great and essential preparative for heaven !

Much parental prudence is due to an infant state. In law, Hannah was not bound to journey ; her devout inclination she sacrifices to duties of a mother, and would, so soon as proper, wait to instruct at home. With the best united endeavours

^a Matth. vii. 1, 2.—v. 7. ^b 1 Pet. iii. 1. ^c Rom. xiv. 1, 20.—xv. 1, &c.

trust in God for establishment. The irreligious have little in comparison, to expect from grown up children. Once more, sweet concord ! Happy couple !

XXII. HANNAH'S SONG.

Chap. ii. 2. *There is none holy as the LORD : For there is none besides thee ; neither is there any rock like our GOD.*

PRAYER and thanksgiving cannot well separate. The very freedom of access to a throne of grace is matter of high exultation. Such was Hannah's devout sentiment, upon her being accepted of God, in one very singular request. There is none holy as the LORD, and so on.

The Hebrew poetry is grand to admiration ; and yet, like most other languages, in their early state, has but few diversified words, which is one reason why such subjects are sometimes difficult to explain. Events, thus transmitted, did bring their own meanings along with them. Their allusions, and imagery throughout, had well educated interpreters. What was understood to come directly from God, and no less directly to terminate in him, would meet with special regard. Being musically set, they would impress young memories so much the more.

Whole national histories have been thus handed down ; and an advantage has been taken of this method, by people not a little erroneous. It would be worthy, therefore, of the more enlightened, to counteract them, at least by vocal good measures ^c. Exercises of this sort, strictly scriptural, would soon banish, under God, all weak or worse compositions, either in poetry or prose.

Love to truth, then, as well as singing, ought to recommend some pains for receiving church-musical instruction.

There is none perfect in holiness, as the LORD JEHOVAH, comprehending therein every other moral attribute of wisdom, goodness, justice, and truth ^d. Even angels, and se-

^c Col. iii. 16.

^d Isa. vi. 1, &c.

raphs, compared with him, are not clean, but chargeable with imperfection.

There is none besides thee, of equal excellence and majesty. Neither is there any rock for strength like our God ^c. Mean fictitious heathen deities did on the other hand sell their blinded worshippers to ruin, verse 31, even enemies themselves being Judges. Talk no more exceedingly proudly, says devout Hannah, having a special eye to one arrogant cruel mocker, it may be, for GOD the LORD hath shut up their mouth. If Peninah be here meant, it is a very just, and yet delicate rebuke.

The LORD is a God of knowledge, adds Hannah, and by him actions are weighed. He understands how to do things, not only great, but even apparently impossible at the time. He prepares human works to an issue quite above their designs very often, and even contrary to them. His balance is an even infallible one; whereas theirs, before taken notice of, is altogether uncertain, and by no means to be depended upon.

They are blessed therefore, and such alone are blessed, who rely upon his infinite wisdom, and power, and love. The bows of the mighty men are broken by him with ease; and they that stumble from want of support, are girt of a sudden with strength invincible. So they that are full in their own imagination, are no less suddenly brought to want. Ah, how fluctuating are all human advantages ^f.

Those who are an hungered shall cease to suffer; while those who are accounted strong, even in their posterity, shall wax feeble. The LORD GOD Omnipotent killeth, and maketh alive. He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up from thence. With him, and him alone, dwelleth such sovereign power. Thither let the vicissitudes of life teach us all to fly. See now and lay it to heart, that none can deliver out of his hand.

Sing unto the LORD, O ye his saints, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness. He may make poor at times,

^c Deut. xxxii. 30.

^f Psal. xliv. 6.

but he maketh rich again. He bringeth low, and he lifteth up. Yea, from the dust and from the dung-hill. He is known to sit with princes, and makes them by virtuous elevation inherit the throne of glory.

The chief of all glory, then, must be likeness to him, who is King of kings, and Lord of lords. He will keep the feet of such saints in their most sublime everlasting concerns; but the wicked shall be silent in darkness of misery: For by strength shall no man prevail ^a.

XXII. HONOURING GOD.

Chap. ii. 30. *For them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*

TO honour or worship God is, in general, to express our belief and esteem of his infinite perfections, whether visible or invisible ^b. The last of these, and by much the most important, comprehends in it a well informed and attentive mind ^c. Reverential fear ^d. A calm and unruffled disposition ^e, with upright endeavour to please ^f.

That we seek his favour by prayer ^g, especially that we may be sanctified ^h, and find comfort under trouble ⁱ. That we praise and give thanks ^j. Hear his word; read and meditate ^k. That we be charitable, and communicative ^l. That we pay all due respect to sacred things, as his Name, Day, and outward Ordinances ^m. That we occasionally vow to, and swear by him ⁿ. A prime instrument for the service of society.

Engaging ourselves to God, should be after mature previous thought ^o. Beware of profane swearing; likewise of

^a 2 Peter iii. 7, &c.

^b Luke iv. 8.

^c John iv. 24.

^d Heb. xii. 28.

^e 1 Cor. vii. 35.

^f 1 Tim. ii. 8.

^g Mat. i. 6. &c.

^h Phil. iv. 6, 7.

ⁱ Luke xviii. 1.

^j John ix. 31.

^k Isa. lv. 6.

^l Psal. l. 23.

^m 1 Deut. xxxi. 12.

ⁿ Prov. iii. 9.

^o Psal. xcvi. 6.

^p — cxxii 1. Matth. xviii. 20.

^q 1 Cor. xiv. 26. &c.

^r Heb. vi. 16.

^s Deut. vi. 13.

^t Jer. iv. 2.

^u p Eccl. v. 4, &c.

superstition.

superstition. As Christians, we should be specially attentive to the duties of baptism and the LORD's Supper. Do all in the name of CHRIST^a. To despise the above must incur great condemnation^b.

XXIII. A FAITHFUL PRIEST.

Chap. ii. 35. *And I will raise me up a faithful priest, that shall do according to that which is in mine heart, and in my mind: and I will build him a sure house; and he shall walk before mine Anointed for ever.*

PERHAPS the person here referred to may have been Zadoc, spoken of 1 Chron. xxix. 22. To be continued in the office of the priesthood long. He, and his descendants were to be faithful, and loyal before the LORD's anointed. Understood by some as typically prophetic of CHRIST.

Fidelity imports a discharge of trust to the utmost. All heroic and generous in the sublime. To be ever humbly imitated. Immediate divine revelation determined each^c. It is the will of GOD that all, consistently with human freedom, should be saved. Commands and arguments import power to obey. Force would destroy reason.

To build a sure house, in a large sense of that expression, must take in another world, besides that of time to himself and family. The most faithful did not always succeed to their wish, but will find a great and sure reward to their willing mind. Nor is it always known to them in this world when they are successful, nor well can be^d.

Most exemplary behaviour is due to the chief in human government, by both ministers and people. Much more still to the head of the Christian Church^e.

^a Col. iii. 17. Phil. ii. 9.

^b Mark viii. 38.

^c Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

Jam. i. 13, &c.

^d Heb. iii. 6. Rom. v. 1, &c.

^e Isa. lv. 1, &c.

XXIV. EMINENT SUBMISSION.

Chap. iii. 18. — *And he said, It is the LORD ; let him do what seemeth him good.*

THE occasion of these words, considered, furnishes matter of instruction to both parents and children. Eli's sons had shockingly behaved, and without due chastisement, verse 13. Hence says JEHOVAH, when I begin I will make an end of the house of Eli. Their guilt was not to be purged. What would judicially happen, as set forth to Samuel, would make every ear to tingle ; who being young was to have Eli himself for an instructor.

Whilst Samuel feared to shew what the LORD had said, Eli would not be denied, saying, I pray thee hide it not. Nay, in effect, he puts him upon oath : and Samuel told him every whit. Then said the late over-indulgent father, It is the LORD God Omnipotent, let him do what seemeth him good. Words of great moment, as they stand in connection.

Parents are but too apt to exceed in tenderness, and the children uncorrected bring on sore calamities. Both of them painful to be enlarged upon ^a. Watch the young with anxious concern. One crime leads to another ; so may one oversight of what is wrong. Playfulness is not guilt, though at times, there may be appearances which ought to be checked. When understanding is weak sensitive bodily desires are often strong. Eli's neglect of this was capitally cruel to multitudes. Clean the ground early of weeds, and pray for a blessing.

It is a sad thing when they who should lift up the aged parental head, bring it down with sorrow to the grave. After all, submission is at once dutiful and relieving, It is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good. LORD, not as I will, but as thou wilt. True greatness of soul in the main. Not stupid, but humble and resigned to him who is unerring ^b. Happy temper ^c. Who should rule the world save him who is the author of it ^d ?

Opposed to the above is fretfulness, murmuring, uneasiness, distrust ^e. We should attend to the errand upon which

^a Prov. xii. 24.

^b Gen. xviii. 25. Ezek. xviii. 25.

^c Phil. iv. 7. Luke xxi. 19. Jam. i. 12.

^d Heb. xii. 5. Prov. iii. 11.

Deut. viii. 5. 1 Peter ii. 19. Hab. iii. 17.

^e Lam. iii. 39.

trouble is sent ; be meek, and wait the issues of things. At no time have our hearts overcharged, but watch and pray ^a. Examine conscience ^b. Seek help from the good ^c. Look through joys departed, for joys to come. Settle secular affairs, and die in peace with all men ^d. Recommend religion to posterity ^e. Be obliging and grateful.

XXV. PROPHETS.

Chap. iv. 1. *And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer : and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.*

BY the word of Samuel is to be understood, the divine revelation which he made, which was precious in those days ^f, from want of open vision. The manner of consulting the ALMIGHTY till now should be attended to, which was first by oracle, and then by prophets.

Oracular consultations were usually made by the chief priest, after sacrifice, and before the mercy seat, whence the answer came ; not of easy apprehension now. Yet surely a gracious allowance, and fit to counteract idolatrous methods ^g. After Moses' days, restricted to Aaron and his successors ^h. Hence the frequent Old Testament expression of God's dwelling between the Cherubims ⁱ. Fasting and prayer did accompany great occasions. We read no more of this method after the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar.

To the above method was often added, the consulting of God by prophets, who did both foresee future events, and teach by his spirit, and very often in hymns. Signal visions at times were allowed them, and which gave them the name of seers ^k. When open and frequent, such days would be understood as precious. From the time of Eli's two bad sons, they seem to have ceased remarkably. So dangerous is the

a Psal. xxxvii. 1, &c. Prov. xxiv. 17, &c. Heb. xii. 7. 1 Peter i. 6.

b Lam. iii. 4.

c Isa. xxxviii. 1, &c.

d 2 Tim. iv. 6, &c.

e 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

f Chap. iii.

g Exod. xxv. 22.

h Num. vii. 8, &c.

i Jud. i. 15.—xx. 18, &c.

k 1 Sam. ix. 9.

abuse of divine gifts. Still prophets were raised up to warn and encourage ^a. Their books for common use were too bulky to be continued.

We may still observe, that those prophets who were of greatest account, did foretell the MESSIAH, and do yet exist with us in their writings, down to Malachi, in whom, till the days of John Baptist, the prophetic spirit appears to have been withdrawn ^b. Thus connects the Old and New covenant ^c.

From the days of Samuel, if not sooner, there appears to have been schools of prophets, whence certain of them were occasionally called forth, with proper evidences of a divine mission. Their communications, by song or hymn, were of great benefit, as were their peculiar trials. Samuel was at the head of one school, and very beneficial ^d.

Admire the goodness of God in the care of Israel ^e. Yet were they most unfaithful ^f. Christians have the substance in place of the shadow ^g.

XXVI. THE ARK RECOVERED.

Chap. v. 11. *So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the GOD of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people : for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city ; the hand of GOD was very heavy there.*

THE children of Israel having gone forth to war without consulting God, they were beat, and the ark itself allowed to be taken, and lodged in the temple of a heathen Deity. Then too was the religiously officiating house of Eli cut off. The narrative throughout is dreadful ! A child born to Phinehas before his wife had quite expired, she did name Ichabod, which signifies the glory is departed, alluding chiefly to the affair of the ark.

From all these disadvantages infinite goodness did educe

a 1 Chron. xxiv. 29, &c. 2 Chron. xi. 29. likewise chapters xii. and xiii.

b Mal. iv. 4. Luke i. 11, &c. c Matth. xvi. 12. d Chap. x. 5, &c.

e Jer. vii. 25. f Matth. xxiii. 23, &c. g Acts iii. 26. x Jo. iii. 8.

much good to mankind. The wicked Philistines themselves stood in awe of the ark; saying, wo unto us, and so forth. Now more than ever was Israel's God made known, by a competition as it were with their idol-god, Dagon; half human, half fish. In the morning the worshippers of this last, in Ashdod, find their Deity fallen upon his face, verse 4. A signal triumph to divine truth! Both more confirmed, and extensively made known by a sore disease upon the idolatrous people, both in Ashdod and Gath. The Ekronites pled to have no such trial from the ark made upon them. Ah, slay not us and our people.

'Then in a general council of the Philistine lords, it was agreed that an ensign of Israel so full of power should be returned with speed. What could better propagate belief in the One only God? A prime instruction from this history. Adorable wisdom and love to an infant state of the human mind. National acknowledgement of God, either in peace or war, is a great duty, be forms of government what they may. Superstition at the same time should be carefully guarded against. When at any time conquered by irreligious foes, this is designed for correction. The ark of divine presence will return to true amendment^a.

XXVII. EBEN-EZER.

Chap. vii. 12. *Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.*

IT has been the practice of all nations to transmit the memory of great events by monuments, and that not unseldom by divine order. Hence, festivals too, holy places, and persons. The stone at Mizpeh might be useful to the serious, which is enough to put them in mind, and others after them, how the LORD had helped, as Eben-ezer imports.

The observation of providence is highly beneficial. Pri-

^a Psal. xxxiii. 10, &c.

vate memoirs, however, should be written, and much more published with great caution, that others be not misled by them. Mark with due care cases of imminent danger, and like deliverances: how deep in sorrows we have been immersed, and yet brought up; what has contributed to good frames of spirit, and what has stood in opposition to these; how charities may have been well exercised, and whence this might happen; when death hath seemed to be the least alarming, and how to encourage this: all sweet methods of self enjoyment, and favourable to virtue. They serve like so many Eben-ezer memorials.

Few but have had such experiences. Yet too often are they forgotten. Far otherwise the devout. Deliverances at sea are sometimes perfectly astonishing! Other sorrows have produced the like.

Devout frames are not always at will, yet are they desirable, though not essential. Familiar pious conversations are of great use for mutual warming. Thus too do charities increase. To devise liberal things, and consider of them, with the good is more than simply to give ^a.

The love of GOD in CHRIST is peculiarly affecting, to do, to suffer, and to die ^b.

XXVIII. KINGS OF ISRAEL.

Chap. viii. 5. *And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.*

THE government of Israel, till now, was a kind of aristocracy, or that of their elders under ALMIGHTY GOD; but, moved by the practice of other nations they would have a king. The law and the tabernacle, till this time, were chiefly to be consulted, though sometimes imperfectly enough, and therefore punished. Thus did they continue for about the space of four hundred and fifty years ^c.

^a Heb. x. 24. Isa. xxxii. 8. James i. 27.

² Tim. i. 12. Rom. viii. 32, &c.

^b Psal. xxiii. 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

^c Acts xiii. 20

They

They then insist with Samuel, who had judged them well upon the whole, to have a king. They seem to have feared succession to him by two indifferent sons. Their Almighty patron hitherto should have been consulted. But they were rash, and had a suitable answer given them, by a description at the same time of arbitrary monarchical rule. This shall be the manner of their king, and so on. A dreadful picture ! Yet not overdone. Josephus among the Jews, and Aristotle among the heathens, speak nearly in similar terms. Twenty generations of Israelitish monarchs did confirm the whole.

How inestimable on the other hand is the government by a king, like that of Britain, limited by clear parliamentary laws. If not perfect, it comes the nearest to it of any thing possible. Some few neglects in governors, or worse, do not always justify an immediate and entire change. Much softer means may operate a cure. Said the LORD to Samuel, they have not only rejected thee, but me in effect. A kingdom divided by similar hasty alterations must suffer much. Pride, envy, selfish zeal, and hope of superiority will not fail to operate. Only manifest, persevering arbitrary measures ought to be resisted. Better to die brave, than live under mere tyrannical will. Such revolution is glorious to religion, law and liberty. Be ever in readiness to meet as one man against the common foreign foe. Even high taxation, in this case, should be patiently submitted to.

PART VI.

I. SAUL ANOINTED.

Chap. x. 1. *Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance.*

THE Jewish impatient demand of a king is first answered in Saul, a character of great mixture. To a ma-

jestic conciliating form, he had at times good address. In a mission from his father, more honourable than may seem to us now, he is directed to consult Samuel ^a, and that as the custom of the east was, with a present, verse 7. Of this interview Samuel had been secretly foretold by the LORD. Hence did the prophet consecrate him in part, as captain to the army of Israel against the Philistines. He is therewith astonished and modest; Am not I a Benjamite, and so on? Quite becoming. The prophetic assurance is further confirmed to him by signs. Saul and servants feast upon the remains of a peace-offering, or thanksgiving sacrifice.

The next day early, he is anointed with further agreeable instructions ^b. Thou shalt come to the hill of GOD, &c. In the way thither he was to be met by a company of prophets singing and playing to the above purpose probably. And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee likewise, verse 6.

Henceforward, the LORD GOD shall be with thee, whilst thou dost improve by these high honours, to be more publicly known in a few days at Gilgal. Those who knew Saul before, saw and did wonder, saying, behold he prophesied, singing among the prophets. Used after this proverbially.

In consequence of the above, Samuel called all the tribes of Israel by their representatives, to confirm the choice, for solemn publication, verse 21. At a new order from the ALMIGHTY, Saul is found, and the people shouted, saying, GOD save the king. Hence he went home in a kind of triumph to Gibeah.

Yet there were murmurers of no good disposition, who did scorn to be saved by such an one, and gave but too clear marks of despite. Saul, at the time, did prudently hold his peace. The kingdom, by a large majority, is confirmed to him ^c.

The enemies to Saul made their offers of service to Nahash, an Amorite, and foe to Israel, but were refused. This, for obvious reasons, did affect him. Their punishment being severe had beneficial consequences for the time. And the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and led them to loyal subjec-

^a Chap. ix. 6.

^b Chap. x. 2, &c.

^c Chap. xi.

tion. Next day the murmurers were publicly pardoned. Soon after, they conquer Ammon. An illustrious beginning to Saul's reign.

Hitherto he is firm in mind, or courage, calm and moderate. Mercy rejoices over judgement. The investiture of the kingdom is then more solemnly renewed than ever, with suitable festival sacrifices. Devotion suitable to public and private peace.

II. SAMUEL'S CERTIFICATION TO ISRAEL.

Chap. xii. 24, 25. *Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart : for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both you and your king.*

SUCH were the words of an aged prophet. He had ministered to Israel nearly from his childhood, and could appeal to the whole for a general inflexible integrity. They freely and gratefully own their obligation. The LORD, continues he, witness between us. Glorious exit !

Then, he devoutly reminds them of divine mercies amidst manifold provocations. And now that they had got a king at their own desire, who, as yet had been universally approved, their interest and their obedience to the duties in the text would be found closely connected. His words receive a kind of celestial confirmation, by an unusual thunder, and foretold. Thus did the people greatly fear the LORD, and Samuel. No wonder, as the certification was truly tremendous

To fear the LORD is fundamental in holiness, that is, with filial affection. The more such love, the more they dread to offend ; whereas slavish fear is hereby cast out ^h. The support of this is regular devotion.

Serving God in truth imports a pure well informed mind ; not compatible with rash sentiments. Mistake, after due pains, will never be blamed. Heart and affection follows sound light ⁱ. This has all the other powers at command, and sanc-

^h Eccl. xii. 13.

ⁱ Matth. xii. 36. 1 John v. 3.

tifies even small acts, heartily as unto the LORD. How animating!

It is both pleasant and useful to consider, how great things God hath done for us. This at once rises from obedience and increases it. National good is that which Samuel had in view. Certifications against ingratitude are highly proper. Some must be alarmed even to horror. Let our houses be sanctuaries, and our bodies temples meet for the Holy Spirit ^a.

III. SAUL FORFEITS HIS KINGDOM.

Chap. xiii. 14. *But now thy kingdom shall not continue : the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.*

SAUL's sudden and high elevation did soon render him presumptuous. He enters upon war without legal sacrifices, contrary to Samuel's charge ^b. He was impatient lest his enemies might increase, and waited not the proper time. Nor was his temper otherwise good. Whereupon the prophet did warmly and justly expostulate, saying, what hast thou done ? and so on. His answer was quite unsatisfactory. He took his own method in preference to law ; at once vain and impious.

The noble minded prophet said unto him, thou hast done foolishly, assigning his reasons. But from what has happened, being a sure presage of further wrong, thy kingdom shall not continue in the family, but be given to another. An affecting lesson to all who govern.

David, as successor, is not obscurely hinted at as one who, in public concerns, would be much more respectful of divine commands, and thus far after God's own heart. The private character is not comprehended in that phrase, though, considering the imperfection of the Jewish æconomy, few afterwards did equal him. Better by far he was than Saul, as a monarch,

^a Heb. x. 24, 25.

^b Chap. x. 8.

and even as a man. Out of battle who more gentle and mild? He would not, when it was in his power, smite the LORD's anointed. Again, it is of divine permission, let Shimei curse on.

"In my name shall his horn, or kingly government be exalted with honour." A first born, or chief among kings. Though not allowed to build a temple, it was in his heart, and what he had prepared many instructive songs for. Taking them in whole, quite inestimable. Some allowances ought to be made even for the faults of such an one, and they were neither few nor small. What sinner, after his example, can promise such amendment^a? He shines as a worshipper of the One living and true God, and ever must.

Gospel means of holiness require still more perfection^b.

IV. JONATHAN, AND HIS ARMOUR-BEARER.

Chap. xiv. 6. *And Jonathan said unto the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us: for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few.*

SPECIAL providences in war should be well attended to. The Philistines, ever watchful to overthrow Israel, did meditate a great design against them, with an immense number of armed chariots; besides fighting men on the plain, and their heights deemed impregnable. Then Saul ordered the trumpet of war to be blown, through all the land of Israel, but not with complete success. Numbers did hide themselves.

Jonathan, his son, did then conceive a hazardous, but most heroic enterprise, which even cowards about him might profit from. By one narrow pass, he meant to scramble up with a faithful armour-bearer behind him. Come, let us go on, said he, the LORD will work for us. Brave and devout. Such too was his armour-bearer. Behold I am with thee. At break of day the enemy are astonished with what they had made no pro-

^a Acts vii. from verse 46.

^b Acts xvii. 31. John xii. 48.—xv. 22.

vision against. The two agree upon a sign and are successful. Fright, among the Philistines, magnifies two into a great number behind, and about them, from holes and caverns. And thus became an easy prey. The slaughter of unarmed men, and half asleep, was great, by means of other Hebrews who closely followed. So did the LORD work for Israel, whose it is to save by many, or by few. Saul, pious only by starts, did evince that dread more than love did affect him.

He makes an unadvised adjuration, verse 24, cursed be the man, and so on. It was cruel to those who had been long in battle, and exhausted, and was hard upon his own brave son, who did not, perhaps could not abstain from honey dropping before him from a tree, to cheer his eyes and his heart, encouraging his people to do the same. In rage, like that of a provoked lion, Saul would have slain his valuable son, but was hindered by brave followers, verse 45. Shall Jonathan die, &c. As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall, for he hath wrought with GOD this day. So the people rescued Jonathan.

How horrible to live under tyranny ! Ho g racious is sovereign power, limited by law ! Most wise and beneficial in kings it is to acknowledge GOD. They employ as much as they can, similarly devout, calm, and brave. All under them do profit thereby. Behold we are with thee, to conquer or die. Blessed are the people whose GOD is the LORD. Righteousness exalteth, and sin is a reproach.

V. OBEDIENCE AND SACRIFICE.

Chap. xv. 22. — *Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt-offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the LORD ? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.*

THE imported religious principle in these words is of infinite value: that real holiness is preferable to mere outward forms ; be these last ever so manifold and pompous. They are subsidiary, and as such, ought not to be neglected,
save

save in cases of competition where one must yield to the other. Here a call to obedience should take the lead.

What belongs to this, is in its own nature good, which cannot be said of positive duties. They are therefore of everlasting, and immutable obligation. The human mind, however, is apt to be much affected by visible striking ceremonies. Clear and exquisitely beautiful !

How much better then to obey the voice of the LORD, than sacrifices ?

Baptism, the LORD's Day, and the LORD's Table are positive duties indeed, but have great power over both devout and moral affections. To obey, is next to inseperable from a right use of them.

VI. HOW GOD JUDGES CHARACTERS.

Chap. xvi. 7. *But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature ; because I have refused him : for the LORD seeth not as man seeth : for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.*

SAUL, at the time of his being anointed king of Israel, set out fair, but very soon discovered symptoms of a rash and cruel temper. From certain selfish motives, he did spare the life of Agag, whom he had clear orders to destroy, and that, under a pious pretext too. A vice of special aggravation. Whence his ejection from regal office is foretoldⁿ. Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt-offerings, as in obeying his voice ? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. Stubborn, impious disobedience is rebellion.

And Samuel came no more unto Saul, until the day of his death. Yet parentally he did weep for his guilt. An example of compassion to others. Next, he is sent to Jesse, the Bethlehemite, to intimate the succession of David, as king. Brave as the prophet was, he feels and owns an alarm in his mind, which his gracious LORD doth soon remove. He goes personally and peaceably thither. Pleased with Eliab's looks, the

LORD said unto Samuel, judge not from his countenance, and so on : for adds he, The LORD seeth not as man seeth. He penetrates the heart. For like reason, he refuses the rest of Jesse's family, till David appeared, who was the youngest. The soul, in part, was soon seen in that young man's manner. He was goodly to look at.

By a sudden impulse, not so easily explicable now, Samuel receives an order to anoint him, by what had been consecrated, and kept in the tabernacle for that purpose. Sweetly fragrant. And the spirit of the LORD from thenceforward, in gifts and graces, came upon David.

The whole of the above may have been done in private. In like proportion the spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, verse 14. A tremendous judgement ! His servants modestly advise permission to send for a skilful player on the harp, to relieve his frequent fits of melancholy. A natural and well judged cure in most cases. The king allows, and David is sent for. He was known to be valiant as well as cunning, or skilful in music, verse 18. Agreeable to the eastern manner, he is introduced ; his ass laden with bread, and a bottle or cask of wine, and a kid. The graceful appearance caught Saul's attention at once, and he became his armour-bearer.

Being greatly refreshed by the harp, which did merit a more grateful steadfast return. It is not always safe to judge of either sex from their looks alone ; nor yet ought to be disparaged. Sense, temper and virtue, do often affect human lineament, and carriage. Ferocious spirits are more than most others to be avoided ^b.

VII. DAVID AND GOLIATH.

Chap. xvii. 45. *Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield ; but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the GOD of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.*

THE idolatrous Philistines set themselves in battle-array, upon the side of one of the mountains of Judah, the

^a Chap. xvii. 20.

^b James iii. from verse 13, &c. 1 Peter iii. 3, &c.
worshippers

worshippers of the true GOD did encamp upon the side of an opposite hill, and there lay a valley between them. Thither, for no less than forty days, came there a Philistine giant, and bid defiance to Israel in a single combat, verses 8, 9. Thereby filling them with dread and shame. Three of Jesse's eldest sons were in Saul's army, and had meat brought for them by David. At one time of his being here, the Philistine drew nigh as usual, and made his challenge. David's indignation rose, and was perceived by his brethren, who did chide him for a desire to accept so unequal a challenge. He perseveres notwithstanding, and delivers his admitting present to the captain-general.

A principle of piety was at bottom in our young hero, with some ambition it may be too, verse 25. David, therefore, calmly answers to Eliab, is there not cause my brother; that is, for doing what he can to terminate the insult. He is brought to Saul, who scruples at first to hazard so much upon him. At length, and upon probable grounds shewed, the king submits.

He who hath defied the armies of the living GOD shall not now, if possible, exist upon earth. The same good LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and of the bear, he will yet deliver. And Saul said unto David, go, and the LORD deliver thee. He next, as was natural, by his officers proceeds to clothe him with armour, which the pious skilful youth declines to accept, upon the most prudent grounds.

And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones, and so forth. And his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine, as the Philistine did to David; disdaining him, as more like a female than a man. Am I a dog, to be combated with a staff. Cursed creature, come, and I will give thy flesh to fowls and beasts. To whom the hero returns, thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield, but I come unto thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the GOD of the armies of Israel. This very day will he deliver thee into mine hand. Devout nobility of spirit.

David then hastens to the Philistine, and put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine

in his forehead, so that he fell to the ground. Next, with the giant's own sword, he slew him thoroughly, and cut off his head. The army he belonged to fled, and were pursued in all quarters, to their utter overthrow.

And thus was Israel's God universally known, a prime purpose of their history, from the beginning. At this time and ever afterwards, there became an intimacy between David and Jonathan, the king's son. They whom God leads and protects are sure to be happy. Yet are they, upon occasions, corrected. In their lowest moments, they are upheld and saved. Whereas God resisteth the proud.

VIII. DAVID AND JONATHAN.

Chap. xviii. 3. *Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.*

DAVID, in his outward person, was agreeable^s; yet compared with his great mind, of small account. Brave and calm; devoted in heart to God. Becoming acquainted with Jonathan, their very souls did knit. A true picture of friendship; prudent each, modest, disinterested, and devout. Hence, they made a mutual covenant of amity for life. This being a matter of choice is no proper subject for command, and shews the excellency of our gospel.

When entered upon, and continued with proper principles, it is a sweet and useful bond. Prudence must take the lead. We cannot esteem without previous knowledge. Much less tenderly love. Our divine Saviour, and the beloved disciple, had good access to each other. Frequent familiar intercourse ought to endear and not cool. Avoid reserve, and distrust still more. A mistake in connection should, as much as possible, be made up by special civil usage, and culture. Study dispositions, and how to please. Yield often, if it be not to what is unlawful.

Modesty in judgement and behaviour is most strengthening

to friendship. Liableness to irritation is no less dangerous, the daughter pride ^a. Disputes as to pre-eminence are absurd, pestive. Friends, more than any, ought to have all things in common. Mine and thine is language quite improper. Leave this to little single souls. Be ever disposed to oblige. Pious regards to infinite love leads to special affection for all his creatures. The saints more than any.

The abuse of worship hurts, rather than mends the temper. A street saint, and a home devil, is hideous ^b ! Genuine prayer is the daughter of charity, the sister of meekness. From God it returns loaded with a blessing, and the dew of heaven.

IX. SAUL WROTH WITH DAVID.

Chap. xviii. 8. *And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him ; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands : and what can he have more but the kingdom ?*

SAUL, from affection to David at first, would have retained him at court ; but his presence was necessary, for a while, at home. At length jealousy of growing fame began to operate ; with Jonathan's special attention to him, verse 4. Saul, from being indifferent, became wroth against him. After a complete victory over the Philistines, they were met by the women-singers.

And what can he have more than to be thus highly praised, said Saul ? From that day forward, he wishes for an opportunity to slay him. A hideous self-consuming disease, like rottenness of the bones. To be good is the way to increase such wicked rage. Suspicion alone is their proof, and what will not envy suspect ? Having a javelin in his hand, and at the very moment David was playing to banish Saul's melancholy, he threw it at the generous hero, saying, I will smite thee even to the wall. Detestable, cruel, ingratitude ! Being avoided the prince is set on fire, and yet is not without his fears, verse 12.

^a 1 Peter iii. 6. Rom. xii. 3.

^b Matth. xviii. 6.

Conscience is a faithful monitor. If Saul sung, before taking this aim, his guilt was the more aggravated.

A sound heart was the consolation of David, especially when in an act of benevolence ^a. It is like the sprightliness of much health. What a contrast to living like jealous envy, upon the wretchedness of others ! Scarce, if at all, is this last to be reclaimed. In marrying his daughter to David, agreeable to promise, Saul has no good design. He hoped to render her a snare unto him. Say unto David, and so on. Arrant hypocrisy !

He modestly declines the honour, or from reasons of prudence, and at length accepts upon having an act of signal prowess made mention to him, as his dowry, that of slaying no less than two hundred Philistines, and bringing sure evidences of this with him. An arch contrivance to have the hero cut off. It may be, that then there were many such skulkers against Israel. In a short space David did execute this, and the marriage was accomplished. Their mutual attachment was a new source of terror to the jealous father, verse 28. David's death he becomes more than ever set upon. Most savage-like !

Jonathan, as much as possible, would have turned away his father from such a thought, but in vain, upon the whole ^b. Once more David escapes the Javelin, and fled. He is let down by a window, and saved ^c.

The noble spirit of religion is to do good to all and offend none. The reverse is satanish.

X. SAUL PROPHESIETH.

Chap. xix. 22. *Then went he also to Ramah, and came to a great well that is in Sechu : and he asked and said, Where are Samuel and David ? And one said, Behold, they be at Naioth in Ramah.*

DAVID, now son-in-law to the king, is mortally hated by him, on account of his credit with Israel. Yet now,

^a Isa. xxxii. 8.

^b Chap. xix. 9.

^c Prov. xxiv. 17, 18.
after

after some flattery, he is invited to the royal presence, and perfidiously struck at. But Michal, his wife, did save him as above. Nor could he be found next morning, though all the doors of the palace were watched.

Upon inquiry it was found, that he had gone to Samuel, at Ramah. So they went together to Naioth, not far distant, where was a college of prophets; accustomed much to devout praise, both vocal and instrumental. Few employments either more rational, or joyous^a. And it was told Saul, &c. His messengers did join in the chorus. If it was one of their own ancient compositions, this would be easier done.

They make no haste to return with the capture of David. A delay which the rage of Saul could not suffer with ease. He sent others, and they too did prophecy. A third time the like is repeated. Admire the wondrous, useful charm! Nor it is probable were superior divine influences wanting. Even an irritated Saul is the same way overpowered.

Then went he, not to be devout, but with an evil, cruel design, and is caught at the time to quite a different measure. Behold, he too prophesieth. What glorious mean of penitence was here! But without superior force, tyranny in power is not to be controulled. At Ramah, meeting the whole college of prophets in heavenly exercise, he stript off his upper clothes before Samuel, and played. The prophet himself lay down. How could all these things be forgotten? Yet one evil passion holds out to the last. A special warning to sinners in every future age. A person's own iniquity, though but single, may be their ruin. Such, though occasionally affected, may yet continue bad. Anger is cruel, and wrath is outrageous, but who can stand before envy^b? Prostitute not sweet music to what is low and vile, but sing and make melody to the LORD.

^a Col. iii. 16.

^b Matth. v. 8. Jam. i. 6, &c.—ii. 10.—iv. 5.

XI. JONATHAN'S ANGER AND GRIEF.

Chap. xx. 34. *So Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no meat the second day of the month: for he was grieved for David, because his father had done him shame.*

IN certain cases, anger may be justified. Not to sin in such a case is matter of difficulty to the very best. They who grieve for guilt are least in danger. So it was with Jonathan, when he arose from his father's table. Long fasting argues the depth of his distress.

The king his father had hunted for the life of an innocent, useful man, verse 1. Though heir-apparent to the crown, the whole evil designs against David are carried on without his knowledge. Why should my father hide this thing from me, &c. David then sware to the truth of what he had said, and that their mutual attachment had been the cause of such secrecy. As the LORD liveth there is but a step between me and death, judging from human probabilities.

Neither time nor hospitable rights could allay the tyrant's rage. The new moon then was the season of special solemnity. The king sat him down, &c. On the morrow too David's seat was empty, whereupon Jonathan was addressed: Whence is it that the son of Jesse cometh not to meat? Jonathan answers, David earnestly asked of me leave to go to Bethlehem, for a family sacrifice in the city. Then the unnatural parent's anger was kindled, venting itself horribly. Remonstrances were to no purpose. Smothered malice becomes absolutely boundless. In such case, to aim at restraining will put ordinary favourites themselves in no small danger. Saul could no longer conceal himself. So Jonathan arose, &c. His conduct was fair and justifiable. His grief was generous. Both sure signs of religion ^c.

^c James i. 26—iii. 1, &c. 13, &c. Isa. xlii. 2, 3. Matth. xi. 28, &c.

Psal. xxxiv. 11, &c. 1 Peter iii. 6. Heb. xii. 14.

XII. DAVID's EXILE.

Chap. xx. 41. *And as soon as the lad was gone David arose out of a place toward the south, and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed himself three times: and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded.*

TO escape death, David conceals himself for a time in Ramah. By signs Jonathan and he resolve occasionally to meet. At a time appointed, Jonathan with his lad went out early. The lad himself knew not the import of their signs. Then he gave him his artillery to be carried to the city, when David, with much respect and love, met his friend.

Their parting they were both sensible could not be for a short time, whence devout and brave as they both were, they embraced and wept. The people of God too, and sacred solemnities were to be left. In short, he was to be an exile ^r. Go in peace, and so on. Quite moving.

Unto Natioth, in Ramah, Jonathan returns, still suspected by his father in great wrath, verse 30. Do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse, to thine own confusion, &c.? Wherefore now send and fetch him, for he shall surely die. Thus did the lion-tyrant roar aloud.

Banishment illimited is peculiarly affecting, from those of experienced wisdom and worth. And was it a small matter, for two such knit souls to be separated? There is such an one that sticketh closer than a brother. Death may separate, but cannot part them. All is friendship in heaven ^s.

Around an exile how affecting is the sight of idolaters, and the want of true worship ^h. Impious vice is peculiarly horrible. Saint communion is next to that with infinite love ⁱ. To be abridged of worship has something like the shadow of death in it.

^r Verse 42, &c.^s 1 Cor. xiii. 12, 13.^t Psal. xi. 1. —

lxiii. 1, &c. — lxxv. 4. — xxvii. 4.

^h Psalms xlii. cxxxvii.ⁱ Psal. xi. 1. — lxiii. 1, &c. — lxxv. 4. —

xxvii. 4.

XIII. DAVID OBTAINETH HALLOWED BREAD.

Chap. xxi. 6. *So the priest gave him hallowed bread; for there was no bread there but the shew-bread that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.*

TRUTH, to a certain degree, may be concealed. To say violated may be too much. Yet there are allowances for strong temptation, as in the case of David, hotly pursued by Saul for his life. Then he came to Nob, not far, it is likely, from Jerusalem, to Ahimelech, the officiating priest, and whose chief at the time, may have been Abiathar^a, to advise with, and obtain his blessing. From the knowledge he had of David's interest at court, he is afraid of evil from the capricious monarch, and modestly doth question him. The reply was a contrivance to effectuate his own safety.

Next, he informs the priest of his extreme hunger, and that delay of relief might prove fatal. Having no bread of a common nature, he excuses the production of what was holy, agreeable to the divine law^b. Still cases of necessity were understood to be excepted, and David receives; so that neither he nor the priest was to blame. He likewise besought Ahimelech for a spear, or a sword, in regard that he had come off with haste, and had that of Goliath given him; who said, there is none like.

Proceeding hence, another new trial to his veracity occurs, and shews his singular quickness of invention. David feigns himself to be mad, and thus escapes the revengè of Achish, king of Gath. The description is wonderful, and makes the King of Gath appear in a good light. How pitiable is derangement! Away with him.

Actions, places and companies tempting to falsehood, should be avoided with care. Certain crimes lead to this more than others, as putting forth the hand to steal, and taking the name of God in vain^c. Some businesses are neither to be entered upon, nor continued in, with scrupulous regard to truth. To keep free where few only are free is no small honour. Yet let none be

a Mark ii. 26.

b Exod. xxv. from verse 29.

c 1 Peter ii. 11.

too severe. There are beams often where motes are thus taken notice of^a. Lay not snares or blocks for others to stumble over.

Severe arbitrary measures are highly culpable. Require no improper oaths or obligations. Ecclesiastics are not always unchargeable. Prefer works of necessity and mercy to such as are merely positive, without neglecting these last quite. There be few interferences in comparison.

XIV. DAVID AND ABIATHAR.

Chap. xxii. 23. *Abide thou with me, fear not ; for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life : but with me thou shalt be in safeguard.*

WHAT goes before these words is very shocking. Saul, from early reign, was arbitrary, cruel, oppressive. Hence, after great good services, he is vigilant to ruin David, whose virtues themselves were resented as crimes. Even Jonathan, a dutiful loyal son, because David's friend, escapes not undue usage. Cursed rankling envy.

While the persecuted son-in-law lodged in the cave of Adullam, his brethren, or friends, went down thither. People too of narrow circumstances did join him, perhaps reduced from the evil nature of the times^b. Their number became at length four hundred, met not for conquest but defence. Coming to Mizpah of Moab, now in variance with Saul^c, he commended his father to that prince, till he should see what God would do for him. Sweetly filial !

Here he meets with Gad, a prophet of the Most High, who advises him to leave the hold, and to get into the land of Judah ; where he would be directed more at large. In his way thither, he came to the forest of Hareth, where he might lurk, and obtain occasional divine counsels.

Gad, bred up under Samuel, knew of David's having been anointed Saul's successor. A great blessing at the time. Yet

^a Gal. vi. 1, 2. Rom. xiv. 1---xv. 1.

^b Margin of verse 2.

^c Chap. xiv. 47.

fearful, and not very distant scenes are still before him ; dark and intricate to the best. Saul hears of David's being discovered, and charges those of his own Benjamin tribe to watch him, with high promises ; using an artful speech, mixed with motives, and an address to compassion.

One of them, Doeg, and a tool for any vice, informs Saul where his son was, in part true, but followed with a dreadful fiction. The king sent to Ahimelech, with some shew of justice, and all his father's family, as witnesses, who lived in Nob, and sternly charged the chief of them as a conspirator. He seeks no further evidence than that of him who did accuse. Though mildly and briefly answered, the tyrant did but storm at the truth, and instantly orders the execution of a whole family. Turn, said he, and slay these priests of the LORD. Horrible ! Impious !

Some would not obey, but rather expose themselves. Yet Doeg, an ultroneous informer and witness, is not backward to complete both crimes, by murder. On that day, slew he fourscore and five. May royal power be ever found with a sober mind. Let us value the high privilege of British Government. Afterwards, the fierce tyger-man goes to Nob, the city of the priests, with as many as would follow him, and smote with the edge of the sword both men and women, children and sucklings, asses and sheep ! Monster all over !

One only of Ahimelech's family did escape, and fled unto David, whose name was Abiathar, and who made known the dreadful tidings. He foresaw, and now laments what to himself he now seemed to be the innocent occasion of. Abide thou with me, fear not, either personal, or other injury that I can ward off. Our enemies are one, and our defence shall be as one. Noble, heroic generosity !

From the above it appears that most actions are liable to a double construction. Therefore, as much as possible, ought the appearance of evil to be avoided. Even they who watch to misconstrue should be disappointed. Rash and harsh judges merit great condemnation ^b. Motives that lead to practice should be well weighed. When bad men speak what is

^a Verse 16.

^b Matth. vii. 1, 2.

true, they seldom do so from honest affection. Busy bodies, when known, are to be avoided as pests. They breed what is nauseous, and then choose to live upon it.

XV. DAVID INQUIRES OF THE LORD.

Chap. xxiii. 2. *Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.*

ONE method of consulting GOD, in Israel, was by prophets; but a more solemn method was by their chief priest, or one deputed. Returns were then made from the mercy-seat, either in signs, or words, termed by Jews, the *oracle*. Hence the scripture expression of GOD's dwelling between the cherubims.

The tabernacle being at some distance, a prophet did pray^b: This comes nearest to our present case. GOD ever accepts of a willing people agreeable to what they have; as when David had no settled state^c. When their leaders forsook GOD, he forsook them^d.

It was brave to take thought about saving a city, when life was in danger, and worthy of a devout spirit. And GOD said unto David, probably by his prophet, go thou, and be their deliverer. He did obey and came off victorious. What did not Keilah owe to such pious fortitude? Yet, trust not even in princes. They not only die, but are too often ungrateful. The Keilites became treacherous to their benefactor, and join with Saul.

Abiathar gives the hero information of this. Trials affecting! GOD, earnestly implored, then becomes his refuge. Great sufferers are neither studious of words, nor strict order in devotion. They repeat the same, and do so again. Then David, becoming sure of infamous Keilite guilt, departed thence, which saved the city.

And Saul sought him every day, while his son-in-law abode in wilderness strong holds and fastnesses. Ingrati-

^a Exod. xxv. 22. Num. vii. 8, 9. ^b 1 Sam. x. 21. ^c 2 Sam. xvi. 22, &c.
^d 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

tude is base and cruel. Jonathan comes, under God, to relieve this painful feeling, and that with no small hazard to himself; he strengthens his heart still to hold out, confiding in the ALMIGHTY. The counsel of the LORD endureth for ever. The two friends at this time renewed their covenant of mutual attachment, for the third time. And David abode in the ward, and Jonathan went with much secrecy home. Then came up the Ziphites belonging to Judah, for support of Saul. Then, as now, and now as then, the loving kindness of the LORD is his trust. Think how devout! Saul with mixed impiety blesses the Ziphites. Human victims seem like pity to wrathful souls.

XVI. DAVID'S GENEROSITY.

Chap. xxiv. 7. *So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.*

WE have, in what connects with this, a rare instance of magnanimous conduct. David, hunted by Saul for his life, had an opportunity to avenge himself to the full, and nobly declines it. The persecutor being much fatigued came to a cave of some extent, and fit to rest in. The few men of him who was persecuted saw him enter, and informed David, with hope that he would take advantage of it, to fulfil divine promises made by Samuel, that the LORD would deliver him; but the hero, with his usual fortitude, passing the guards found his enemy fast asleep, and, in place of putting an end to his life, cut off the skirt of his robe; which, though a small affront, did smite his then tender conscience, as against the LORD's anointed, and as yet his legal master. If Saul had been what he should have been, David's words to the disappointed soldiery would have admirably answered.

Yet less scrupulous casuistry might have been justified. The deed, however, was great, and even a tyrant ought to have felt what was so generous longer than he did. Such as he was being chosen for life, David's heart is smote. Admirable
symptom

symptom of general good ! Thus did he stay his servants from rising against Saul.

As the king went on his way from sleep, he received information of what had happened in the cave, David from out of a clift, crying with a loud voice, my Lord the king, and so on. verse 3. Then bowing himself to the earth ^a, respectful, and bold at the same time ; mild and glorious, verse 9 ; shewing the skirt of his robe : Know thou, and lay this to heart. The whole is delightful and affecting, verse 13. After whom dost thou come out, in so great ire, &c. What am I, compared, but as a dead dog, or flea ? Not worth thy pains as a prey. The LORD be judge, and plead my cause. Wonderful grandeur of mind ! Soft and mitigating !

In fact, the tyrant is moved for a while, saying, is this thy voice, son David ? How disarming are mild words. Saul wept aloud, and said, thou art more righteous than I, with more to the like purpose of grief. Here consult nature and experience. The worst have their good moods, and judging from these alone, high hopes might be conceived. Habit of worthy acts alone, evince the truth of character. A man of less excellence would have made an end of Saul.

He becomes just in his conclusion at last, verse 20, but is not long consistent. He demands what he had no right to, an oath in behalf of his posterity, and was gratified, the more to conciliate Saul's affection, who then went home.

David, in great prudence, returns with his band to the cave of En-gedi, waiting a further sign of an entire amendment. Hatred and fury, from envy, had next to deranged Saul ^b. As intimates they are not soon if at all to be trusted. To forgive the penitent is essential. Friendship requires more.

XVII. DAVID AND NABAL.

Chap. xxv. 10. *And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David ? and who is the son of Jesse ? There be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master.*

DAVID again in great prudence would make a trial of Saul's constancy, and abode in the wilderness, where

^a Chap. xx. 41.

^b Ecclesiasticus chap. xii. 10, 11.

provision was often narrow. At one time he and his company being sore reduced heard of Nabal in Maon, who had great possessions in Carmel, near Hebron^a; to whom he sent for relief, and with a polite address: Let those whom I have sent find favour in thine eyes, and so on. In thy good festival day compassionate the starving. In gratitude to heaven, spare, I pray thee, and we ask not dainties. Our suffering time, we trust will not be long.

But the niggard would hear no reason, and said, who is this David? and so forth. Things most cutting too he obliquely threw out, as to servants breaking away, &c. Men not fit to be served, but vagabonds. Rude and brutish to a civil message. Shall I then, adds he, take my bread and flesh, and give it unto those I know not whence they be? In the name of God, what made them his only? Why suspect evil of the indigent as such? What right to hide his brutal temper under such a speech, and that to pining misery?

Singular affluence gives no just claim to withhold, but the contrary. Inheritance and industry themselves are of God. Should a fisherman worship his drag? So in the case of other businesses^b. The anxious and indeavour will often defraud. An Omniscient God pervades the heart. He is sole original proprietor. Thy bread itself, however earned, is not thine, So water, flesh, &c. only as a trustee.

The necessitous have, or ought to have their share. God is the maker of them both. Eat, drink, and abuse not. Rejoice and do good. Be prompt and hospitable. Many know well what they would seem to inquire after, on purpose to parry alms.

Where there is an increase of impostors, much caution is due, but not churlish language. Rash giving encourages lying, and idleness, and debauchery. Real objects thereby are materially hurt. Support those first who are best known, or may be, and only hazard a comparative trifle^c. Clamour and pale looks are not easily resisted. Be at pains to search out. This with policy will deter vagrants.

Curb thy Nabal-tongue. In most cases it is rash and cruel.

a Joshua xv. 54, 55.

b James i. 17.

c Eccl. xi. 1, &c.

How nigh to each other are they of one community? Blemish not a good deed. There is a manner in every thing. Seasons and showers come gradually. Follow GOD ^a.

XVIII. DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

Chap. xxv. 18. *Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clustres of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses.*

ABIGAIL, the wife of Nabal, was a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance, verse 3. She seems however, to have been mistaken in her marriage-choice, if she had one. Her husband did provoke David to a great degree, so that he thought in his haste of severe revenge, verse 13. This will not justify. There were many good in the family, and who gave no countenance to their master, verse 7.

They advise their mistress and are heard, when they had no such hope from Nabal. She resolves without delay to meet David with a handsome present, and in an agreeable manner. The bottles seem to have been large leathern casks. And she said unto her servants, go on before me, &c. All which, or as to the greater part, she did prudently conceal from her husband, whom she knew to be rash and violent, as well as covetous. David had gone too far by much, in swearing to revenge; may GOD also do more unto me, &c. Wrath is cruel, but anger is outrageous. A warning this to the best ^b.

And when Abigail saw David, verse 23, she hastened and lighted, &c. Fell on her face, bowed, &c. after the manner of the east, as a preparative for calm hearing. Her speech was every way suitable. If her husband's improper character is owned, there was necessity for it. As his name is, so is Nabal, and folly with him. As the LORD thy GOD hitherto

^a Luke vi. 36. ¹ Pet. iv. 10. ¹ Tim. vi. 18, 19. Heb. xiii. 16. Deut. xv. 7, 8.

Matth. xxv. 31, &c. Eccles. xviii. 15, &c.

^b James i. 20.

hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, continue innocent. Let thy avenging hand be kept up for unrelenting enemies. Take the blessing I have brought with me, for thyself and the young men.

Forgive apparent trespass, for it is well known to me what thou shalt yet arrive at. Admirable throughout ! We have also heard of thy hazards and escapes, by JEHOVAH's means ; and yet shall the soul, or life, of my LORD be bound up, while those of his enemies shall he sling out. Hence shall the present implored pardon be no grief unto thee. Proper even to astonishment. Then, when raised to a throne, remember me thine handmaid in kindness.

Abigail's speech is long, but can never fatigue, being full of art and prudence without cunning. Her conciliatory arguments are judicious and devout. Samuel's revelations did not a little aid her good understanding to sue for peace. Pro-pounded by a woman of beauty, they became invincible.

And David said to Abigail, Blessed be the LORD GOD of Israel, which sent thee to meet me ; and blessed be thy advice, &c. So he received of her hand, that which she had brought, and said to her, go up in peace to thine house.

When beauty, and a good understanding accompany each other, they touch affection not a little. When separated, mental qualities should have the preference by much. Avoid rash oaths, that often lead to what is wrong, and painful scruples. If wrong, execute them not, but repent. What a happiness is it to fall into the hands of a wise enemy ! Such have room for mercy, justice, moderation, and pardon.

XIX. NABAL's DEATH.

Chap. xxv. 38. *And it came to pass, about ten days after, that the LORD smote Nabal, that he died.*

DAVID, after generously sparing the life of Saul, judged it prudent, from knowledge of the enemy's pride and fickleness, to abide for a while in the wilderness, and that with his small chosen band. At an annual miser feast made by

by Nabal, he partook of it largely himself, till he became stupid and drunken. Till the morning light Abigail did not inform him how David had spared his life; and those of his house. A tale of woe, which from the expence thereof, he could not bear. His heart died within him, and became as a stone.

His disease in a very short time became mortal, and ought through all ages to be a warning against covetousness ^a. A niggard's feast is no charity, but has more of waste in it than alms. Before or after death riches may be said to make wings and fly away ^b. How bitter even in remembrance to some. Ah, whose shall these things be ^c? We have no other way to justify David's marriage with Abigail, but that of temporary permission, to prevent worse, in those infant days of the human mind.

XX. DAVID AND SAUL AT HACHILAH.

Chap. xxvi. 12. *So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked; for they were all asleep: because a deep sleep from the LORD was fallen upon them.*

EVEN singular generous usage did not long abate tyrannical rage. This was prudently foreseen and prepared for! At this time Samuel died, or some little while before. Want of necessaries was yet a sore trial in the wilderness. David therefore hazarded himself with certain of the Philistines, rather than approach towards Saul, verse 2, &c. Perhaps he might have had an invitation from the king of Gath, verse 5, 6. That very day, at an interview, he got Ziklag, originally pertaining to Judah, where he dwelt a full year, and four months. Hence he made several excursions against the enemies of Achish, and all with success. There was also policy in being severe against idolaters. He is urged by the king to abide with him, as a chief servant for life.

^a Psal. xxxvii. 7, 16. Heb. xiii. 16. Acts xx. 35.

^b Psal. xlix. 11, &c.

^c Psal. xxxvii. 20, &c.

Yet before this the Ziphites came unto Saul, who had been old enemies to David. Upon information, he is sought for in the wilderness of Ziph, where again he was singularly protected. David, with two chosen attendants, one Abishai for certain, went down in the night, when Saul was found sleeping within his trench or carriage. At some little distance were his guards, headed by Abner, and asleep likewise. Abishai would have put the implacable foe to death by his own spear; but this David's devout regards would not permit; making use of an argument peculiar to the times, and which has been often abused, in support of tyranny. A clear broken oath, under limited monarchy, may and ought to be restricted to law measures. If obstinately wrong, they forfeit all submission.

David's case was different, and his conduct therefore pious, brave, and noble. Destroy him not, and so on. Take the spear, &c. Grand to astonishment! So did they both get away, and honour the Most High God as became them, verse 13. Then David went, &c. Abner is justly ridiculed. See now where the king's spear is. All must be pleased with what did pass between the hero and his yet lawful prince. Why thus pursue? And what have I done, &c.? Cease, O cease to hunt me. Shed not innocent blood. Saul is thus brought under new and strong conviction. I have sinned, &c. Behold, I have played the fool; with a great deal more penitent language. And thus did Saul return.

Hence see how ingenuous and powerful self condemnation may be, without amending. Neither the sins of Saul nor the troubles of David are yet ended. Be not high minded, but fear. Look to the Father of lights for steadfastness.

XXI. THE WITCH OF ENDOR.

Chap. xxviii. 7. *Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.*

AS counterfeit coins are an evidence to the currency of what is real; so are pretended communications with
the

the invisible world, to such as have certainly obtained. The law therefore wisely ordained ^a all due care. It is the sole prerogative of the Most High to foresee, and enable his messengers to do so ^b.

Saul, deranged with passion, seeks after what was unlawful to be consulted with, and is destroyed by it. His best counsellors, Samuel and David, being removed from him, he has recourse to new and hideous presumption; seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, &c. Such are most liable to deception; and when thus wrought upon themselves, to deceive others, for filthy lucre; laden with sins, only fit to be sought for by the most ignorant vulgar souls. The mad tyrant is therefore justly punished with death, and the woman has leave given to be made use of as an instrument.

Court flatterers are seldom wanting; and there is a rage for witch-craft at times, almost every where. We may look back to days past in our own country, with horror; when women of excellent character, and all without evidence, were put to death. Only shocking torture made them confess what they knew nothing of. Such wicked people had Saul to serve him, with all their art. The shrewd imposing woman would not be idle neither.

Master and man came to her by night, saying, I pray thee, divine unto me, &c. Here she is next to half directed; besides what, prior to this, she might have found out from people belonging to Saul. Yet is she cautious and slow, to complete her artifice. She affects terror, and would seem to be relieved from it. Saul sware to her that she should not suffer.

Then said the arch impostor, whom shall I bring up unto thee? He said, Samuel. Amazing credulity! The man of God from celestial rest, and his body in corruption; or if mummied, unable to speak. Delirious quite! The woman next affects to see Samuel, and to be affrighted; probably in a fit, and screaming. Next, she pretends for the first time, to know who Saul was; and being asked what she had seen,

^a Lev. xix. 31.

^b Chap. xx. 27. Deut. xviii. 10, 11.

returns, gods, kings, princes, judges, magistrates. Deep skilled in deception. All ascending out of the earth. Silly to the extreme, Saul inquires as to Samuel's form, whereof she could not be ignorant, and describes at large. The aged child venerates what he saw not himself. Skilled, it may be, like many, in speaking as from different parts of the body, or places of a room, without perceivable lip motion; she carries on her stratagem so much the better: Saying, why hast thou disquieted me? Saul, not what he was, carries on a colloquy with the dead prophet; partly true, and partly impious.

Little art was now requisite. If the LORD indeed be departed from thee, the kingdom, as foretold, must be rent away too; yet will the LORD deliver Israel into the hand of the Philistines; whereat he faints, is persuaded to eat a little, and goes off.

How like false, as was this woman, are all other fortune-tellers? How weak and wicked both, they who consult them? Only fit for regions of ignorance, and yet next to universal, and a great obstruction to pious missionaries. A kind of vague proof at the same time of a future state believed. How happy they, whose faith is more clear and pure! Once with the LORD, his saints can only return with him ^a.

XXII. AMALEKITES.

Chap. xxx. 8. *And David inquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And he answered him, pursue; for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all.*

DAVID, by a singular providence, gets an opportunity for testifying his gratitude to Achish, by fighting against causeless Israelitish invaders ^b. The king doth calmly defend himself, upon the obligations they owed to David, but is not dutifully heard, from pride and envy together.

^a 1 Thes. iv. 13, &c. Tit. ii. 11, &c.

^b Chap. xxix. 3.

Achish apologizes in the best manner he could to David. The chiefs were highly blameable. David mildly expostulates, and did then depart. Thus was his honour saved, and the effusion of brother Israel blood by him prevented. A better opportunity next offers to display his excellence. Amalek, an ancient foe to Israel, came and smote Ziklag. Sad group of sufferings, and heroically aided under the ALMIGHTY patron of David, whom he did then consult, by means of Abiathar, not just regular, but as much so as possible. The LORD answers him favourably, Pursue, overtake, and recover all; which they did with much ease to themselves.

The spoils he did equally share, and with much prudence left a guard to the camp. The covetous cannot be long in friendship, or even long courteous. Give them ever so much they still want more; and hence, they are led to threaten, murmur, break. Such is the precarious state of this world, when to appearance least in danger, it is often just at hand. Say then, if the LORD will. Amalek was distant, and had no provocation given to him. Watch and keep a loose hold of this world, matters of no small difficulty.

Be much with heaven. Sometimes answers are immediate and clear; always certain to the good^a. Base, sordid means are detestable. Overcome evil with good.

XXIII. THE DEATH OF SAUL.

Chap. xxxi. 6. *So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men, that same day together.*

MANY dangers did Saul adventure upon in pursuit of David, to kill him, but now is the cup of his iniquity filled up! Leaving his people in a great measure undefended from the Philistines, and hereby risking his kingdom^b. The enemy sought for Israel, in the valley of Jezreel, and the attack being sudden, and with a great superiority of numbers, did next to assure them of success. In fact, Israel soon fled on every quarter. Saul was their grand object of pursuit, to prevent a rally if attempted.

^a Psalms xxxvii. lxxxiv. 11.

^b Verse 1, &c.

In this they did succeed to their wish, for all the king's sons fell in battle : it is probable, defending their father, verse 3. Himself was dangerously wounded, and that he might not be taken alive, for a sport to idolaters, or to be ignominiously tortured, he chose rather to finish his life, without divine permission, falling upon his sword. Hideous dictate of self-will. No devout acts could he then perform. Even space for repentance he allows not, and is regardless of what God might have to do with him, whose right alone his life was. How unmeet for future blessedness ! Unnatural violence !

David's access to the throne is hereby facilitated. The prince of all devout poets had been now well trained in the school of affliction. Wonderful providences. Let none who would be good seek anxiously after sudden elevations. Pride with arbitrary power is intolerable.

Consolations from trust, prayer and praise put into good poetical dress, are ravishing. Inspiration itself employs often the best naturally qualified. A good beginning is not always a security to like future conduct. Saul in time lived and died a savage. It is for a firm hand to carry a full cup. Prize the land of freedom and laws. What are all eastern luxuries to this ? Behold in Saul a tyrant, and hate the character while we weep over the man.

II. S A M U E L.

XXIV. SAUL AND JONATHAN LAMENTED.

Chap. i. 12. *And they mourned and wept, and fasted until even for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel ; because they were fallen by the sword.*

DAVID having certain accounts of his persecutor's death, is much affected by it, as were his companions, from witnessing

witnessing his grief. They rent their clothes and mourned. Generous truly, all things considered! Much was this heightened indeed, by what had happened to Jonathan his friend.

A song of lamentation he composed for both, to be taught the children of Judah, and along with that, the use of the bow ^a. Original eastern elegances lose by the very best translation. 'The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places ^b. Abrupt questions of this sort leave much to be imagined, and are full of grace. The beauty, or flower, must assist all who can think, applied in particular to useful Jonathan. It hides out of sight the father's rudeness. Both slain, and in one fatal hour! Both conspicuous in battle. Ah, how unseasonably fallen! 'The one chief in rule, the other in excellence.

Tell it not in Gath ^c. Each were neighbouring cities. Grief will often desire impossibilities, or what is next to them. O be not lordly proud, ye enemies of Israel. Ye musical females forbear triumph! A foe rejoicing at hurt irretrievable affects deeply. What a contrast to the song of Moses.

Ye mountains of Gilboa, verse 21, watered with princely blood, let no dew hereafter fall upon you, &c. A mere wish of agony. Yield no produce whatever, for either divine or human purposes. Be ye as places accursed. Perhaps too bold, save in poetical rhapsodism. For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, &c. Ah that the armour of such, should for ever be set aside. How disgraceful in the eye of our foe? Blended in one common mass! Hideous to think of!

From the blood of the slain, the bow of Jonathan turned not, however gigantic his opposers. And the sword of his father turned not empty from mortal executions.

Saul and Jonathan, verse 23, were lovely, &c. in their peaceful, leisure hours, and in their death they were not divided. 'Thus kind to the last, but dreadful to survivors. Friendship for the son overlooks the father's mischiefs. A natural noble exercise of the generous mind! Pleasant in their lives, united in death. When Cæsar saw the head of Pompey, his patriotic foe, he wept, but did not praise him. As to Saul and Jonathan, they were swifter than eagles to discern, and

a 1 Sam. xxi 3.

b Verse 19, &c.

c Verse 20, &c.

take their advantage ; stronger than lions, to make the best of all. Warrior properties, and not to be exceeded.

Ye daughters of Israel, verse 24, weep over Saul, &c. whose spoils so often did enrich you. Each part of the song has its special motive. Say to one another, verse 25, How are the mighty fallen, &c. 'O Jonathan, honour to humanity, thou, like the father, and the father like thee, wast slain in thy high places ! I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan, verse 26. My burden of grief doth next to overwhelm me. Very pleasant, no less than beneficial hast thou been unto me ; thy love to me was as the love of women, ardent, mutual, pure. What tenderness of friendship is here.

How are the mighty fallen, &c. may have been an interlutory verse, and the weapons of war, to be repeated in singing, after different stanzas. As though they would say, ah, and wo is us, for all military glory is now gone from Israel.

Value friendship, and study from David and Jonathan the chief qualities of it. No reserve, no distrust. Only hide what more affliction would be apt to burst. Why are we one, if it be not to relieve ? Ardour is better expressed by mutual ornaments of a meek and quiet spirit than any thing else, when blessed with cheerfulness. A feast indeed !

XXV. DAVID ANOINTED AT HEBRON.

Chap. ii. 4. *And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they that buried Saul.*

DAVID, while Saul lived, would not exercise any regal office, nor till he was called to these in solemn public manner, beseeching the LORD at the same time, probably by Abiathar ^d. Hebron was the place appointed to him, a Levite city ^e. Devotion now, as all along, doth mark his character.

Abner, a captain-general of the late Saul, notwithstanding

^d 1 Sam. xvi. 9.

^e Joshua xxi. 11, 12.

would

would have Ish-bosheth, the only remaining son of the above monarch, to be made king; all, it is probable, with a view to become an usurper of the empire. Hence arose a violent dispute between him and Joab, who sided with David. They met as friends at the Pool of Gibeon, where a proposal was made, that their young men, brought along with them, should play, wrestle, or otherwise sport. They did so, and as previously instructed by Abner, thrust each of Judah's tribe through with the sword. Detestably treacherous! and which, in kind, was soon after punished. Meanwhile, David praises the attention which had been shewed to the burial of Saul, verse 5, and prays for the people who had been principal actors therein; promising withal a requital from himself for such loyalty: another delightful evidence of noble temper, and wise introduction to regal exercise. His people's interests too were deeply concerned^a. He expects a like proper submission to authority in all time coming, and zeal to combat their foes.

Abner and his men, after much bloodshed, are defeated by the servants of David. Certain of his nearest relatives did survive to become famous afterwards. Here, however, the swift-footed Ahasel was smitten by the hand of Abner, and much lamented; leaving a good lesson to all who are young. The traitor thus escapes for a time. Abner perseveres in rebellion, having an addition to the remains of his army, from the tribe of Benjamin, and encamping upon a place of natural strength, Joab took an opposite high stand, and at no great distance, to support the cause of David. Being within cry, Abner proposes a pacification. Messengers too might be employed with flags of truce. Of all wars, civil or intestine ones are the most dreadful. Conquest itself is matter of horror. Each side sprung of the same ancestors, and of the same religion. Thus far brethren. So after a mild return from Joab, verse 27, the trumpet of peace is sounded.

Advise well before aiming at a change. Be first, if possible, in peace-making. Abner never shone so much as now^b. David's party reaching Hebron, he is there anointed.

a 1 Sam. xxxi. 12

b Heb. xii. 14. Math. v. 9.

XXVI. DAVID AND ABNER.

Chap. iii. 9. *So do GOD to Abner, and more also, except, as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so do I to him.*

THERE can be no confidence in those who are destitute of religious principle, as was the case of Abner. Making use of Saul's youngest son, Ish-bosheth, he rent the kingdom for a while. Ambition was at bottom, to be great, at least under a weak nominal prince. Am I to be treated as thy game keeper, &c. Know thou, hereafter, that David is thy righteous king. Henceforth I desert thy interests and fortunes to follow his. So precarious is it to depend upon mere caprice. No engagements whatever can bind them. He might have sworn before this to Ish-bosheth, and required the like from many others. Make no friendship with such. The more clear that crimes are made to some, the more they are imitated. He had been unfaithful before, and now he is furious. Hence too, Ahab hated the upright prophet Micahiah.

Revenge, from mere alteration of outward circumstances, is desperate. Abner determines now insidiously to dethrone. Wicked devices, however deep laid, the ALMIGHTY doth often overrule to accomplish gracious ends. Abner is made instrumental to confirm the just claims of David. Let GOD be sought and every needful good will follow.

And Abner sent messengers to David, verse 12, to obtain a covenant of peace, and engaging ever after to be faithful. Yet was there little or no sense of duty at bottom. The king accepts and not unpolitically. Principles and motives of conduct must be left to an infallible Judge. In the case of Abner one provision only is made, to restore Michal, David's earliest wife, sending at the same time a polite message to Ish-bosheth. These were sad times to pure domestic enjoyment.

Abner begins in earnest to act for David, verse 17. Judah and Israel are brought together, and a solemn public festival made, wherein Abner and some of his companions had special honour done them : herewith Joab is much incensed, and did meditate

meditate revenge of Ahasel's death. How little then were morals considered ! Pursuing Abner with an host, he overtook him with a few, and put their leader to death. Let this blood of Abner, said David, rest on the head of Joab, with an imprecation, not now to be imitated. Ours are days of light in comparison. David feels and ordains a general mourning. Fortitude and tenderness are often closs conjoined. He would not eat for a while, thinking how meanly Abner died.

XXVII. DAVID, BAANAH, AND RECHAB.

Chap. iv. 11. *How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed ? Shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth ?*

SAMUEL, by appointment of God, had anointed David. To this, after Saul's death and his two sons in one battle, the tribe of Judah next to unanimously did consent. He assumes the reins of government at Hebron. Abner's opposition was unsuccessful, and is forgiven, for the sake of general peace. Yet is he slain by Joab, and that treacherously. Wretched times ! Like examples of murder were too common.

Two subjects and likely sworn ones, again conspire. Baanah and Rechab, both captains to Ish-bosheth, came in the heat of day, when he did rest himself agreeable to custom ; and they came thither in the appearance of protecting guards, and smote him to death ; then beheaded him, and got off to Hebron, where David was, and whom they did compliment with the prince's head. Execrable to virtue ! As the LORD liveth, said the noble David, ye shall die. To slay a righteous person in his own house, and upon his own bed, how hideous ! The very summit of social guilt ! Parracidous murder !

Shall I not now require his blood, &c. Heroic as a judge ! And forthwith they are slain by the young men, under so-

vereign order, and hung up for an example in some public place : GOD's just revenge against murder. Thou shalt not suffer such an one to live. Blood for blood, wilfully shed. Ish-bosheth was their king, till set aside by law. The parricide was unprovoked. Yea, he was righteous. A man's domicile should be to him as sacred ; when at rest too, and unsuspecting. The defenceless, like children, are a special trust. Let true nature shudder here for some. Assassination is barbarous in the extreme.

XXVIII. DAVID ANOINTED IN HEBRON.

Chap. v. 3. *So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron ; and king David made a league with them in Hebron before the LORD : And they anointed David king over Israel.*

THERE now remained none of Saul's family, save Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan, who could pretend the smallest right to succeed ; whence David's access to the throne became easy and joyous to all Israel. They even, while he was at Hebron, solicited him to accept. All their arguments were worthy of a free people, and of a prior choice made by infinite love. Each tribe, represented by certain of their chiefs, enters into solemn league with him before the LORD ; and here again he is anointed.

It is agreeable, when both king and people are of like descent, though not absolutely needful. It binds like a tie of natural love to common good. How strong must religious and moral considerations be, when added to this ! And how iniquitous to oppose such ? Valour, with success in war, are highly conciliating ; yet too hazardous an exposure for a king in common, or heir of a kingdom.

David in the field was admirable ! How modest, and yet how brave ! How forgiving, verse 2.

Much confidence may and ought to be placed in such, as leaders. Mild, attentive, pastoral care, is a beautiful idea !
and

and appositely made use of ^a. A favourite ancient style was shepherds of the people ^b. Both heart and hand were in his office, verse 77; for a long reign, and after his thirtieth year.

His first grand act was that of expelling the Jebusites from Mount Zion, then a fort of great value, and to be the site of celebrated Jerusalem. Their boast was proud and provoking. David succeeds, and had right to call the city by his own name, rendering it yet more strong, verse 10. He is complimented upon that occasion by Hiram, king of Tyre most famous for its trade. His present was grand and seasonable. He saw too, and owned God as principal in that acquisition.

Though permitted to the Jews, yet was their polygamy unvindicable, and a source of manifold disorders. Inquiring, as his custom was, of the LORD, if he should encounter a numerous host of Philistines in the valley of Rephidim, not far from Jerusalem, he is allowed, and succeeds, so as to give a new name to the valley, that of breaches, like what is made by waters let out. At another time, and by a wider compass, he is amazingly prosperous, so as to have leisure given him for favourite devout work.

XXIX. THE ARK REMOVED.

Chap. vi. 5. *And David, and all the house of Israel, played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir-wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.*

THE tabernacle was set apart for Jewish public worship first; and next the temple at Jerusalem; both termed sanctuary in scripture. The former was moveable from place to place, and in it was the ark of the covenant, giving name sometimes to the whole, verse 2. For the present, it

a 1 Sam. xvi. 13.

b Psal. lxxviii. 70.

was at Baalah in Judah, the same as Kirjath-jearim^a. From thence, the symbolical presence of the LORD was now to be brought, for ready consultations. All but a shadow of good things to come. Exodus from Chap. xxv. to xxx.; and from xxxvi. to xl. After passing Jordan into the land of Canaan, on the shoulders of priests, the people went safe after them, and other miracles were wrought.

Then was it fixed at Shiloh, whither the Jews went three times every year. Hence it was taken by the Philistines; among whom the ALMIGHTY pled his own cause by judgements, till the ark was restored, with valuable presents. After this, the men of Bethshemish were slain, for presuming to look into it. At their own request, it was carried to Kirjath-jearim, belonging to the same tribe of Judah, and continued for a long time. David having now got full possession of Jerusalem, it was at length to be brought thither, by the care of one of Aminadab's sons.

For a while, it was left in the house of Obed-edom, the Gittite, whence it was to be now carried with great solemnity, being then in a state of peace. This however was not done quite agreeable to the law^b. Otherwise the procession was grand. When, therefore, they came to Nachon's threshing-floor, whether the name of a man or place is not certain, the oxen made a sudden stop, which threatened an overthrow, and was taken hold of by Uzzah; one of Aminadab's sons, who thereupon instantly died, on account of his error. See the marginal translation. Upon this David formed rather too hasty a judgement, denoting the place by a name that signifies breach, Perez-uzzah; and is afraid to go on, lodging the ark at Obed-edom's house.

There it continued for the space of three months. Being a Levite, and having no fixed inheritance, he could thus regard his sacred trust so much the better. With that all his affairs did remarkably prosper. This gave courage again to David, for carrying the ark to his own city. In heart and soul he was devout, and did sacrifice to GOD with thanksgiv-

^a Jos. xv. 9.

^b Num. vii. 9.

ing. With joy he even danced before this symbol of the Divine presence, clothed with a simple linen ephod, in place of royal robes. Affections from music, lead more or less to this. His wife Michal, an incompetent judge, is offended, verse 16. Her proud words, notwithstanding, are mildly answered ^a. A soul rationally and habitually pious is in the centre of happiness. The ark is now set in its proper place, verse 17, with burnt, and peace, or festival offerings. His wife's sarcastic words, he is far from returning in kind, but is humble to an astonishment : I will be yet more vile, &c.

XXX. DAVID'S HUMILITY.

Chap. vii. 18. *Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who am I, O LORD GOD? And what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?*

IT was natural to a pious soul to reflect as David did, verse 2. I dwell in an house of cedar, &c. He would, if allowed of GOD, forthwith erect a magnificent edifice for the ark. The prophet Nathan, who thought well of the design at first, receives that same night a prohibition from the LORD : Say to him who purposes so well, &c. Moreover, I will appoint a place for my people Israel, &c. Whilst they obey, their enemies shall not have power to afflict them, and least of all to conquer. Those who proceed out of thee shall build for my name. A reign is spoken of likewise, which may take in that of the Messiah ^b.

The king's words, upon this occasion, express an affecting and instructive humility : Who am I, O LORD GOD, &c. Profound and beautiful amazement ^c ! And, as if this was a small thing, verse 19. Thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a long while to come. And is this the manner of man with man, O LORD, &c. The times and seasons future are all with thee.

^a Psal. xxvii. 4.—[xiii. 1, &c.

^b Heb. i. 5. Psal. lxxxix. throughout.

Luke i. 33 with verse 17 of our Chapter.

^c Luke i. 52, &c.

And O what can David say more? Thou, O LORD GOD knowest, &c. Grounds for pure and lasting devotion. Thou art great in thyself, O LORD GOD, and thy condescensions are no less so. There is none like thee. Thus have we heard with our ears, and thus have our fathers instructed us.

And what nation of the earth, these things considered, is like thy people Israel, &c.? Thou, LORD, art their chosen covenanted God. They to obey, and thou to prosper. All emphatic, instructive!

Apply these, and what follows, to David's great superior, the CHRIST^a.

XXXI. DAVID AND MEPHIBOSHETH.

Chap. ix. 1. *And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?*

GENEROSITY marks the character of David, as well as a sublime devout spirit. Jonathan, the best son of Saul, had been his intimate. Being now established in the kingdom of Judah and Israel, he thinks of being active at home; inquiring among his first good things, if any of Saul's house or family were yet alive, that he might shew kindness to them for Jonathan's sake. He is informed by Ziba, of Mephibosheth, at some distance, and lame from a fall in early life. A relation so nigh to Jonathan warms his heart, and is carried to him^b.

David having full information from Ziba, as to Mephibosheth, is full of desire to see him, who came and did him reverence, as a subject, and agreeable to the manner of the east. The king hardly finds utterance to do more than name him. Can thou indeed be the son of my friend? His modest return is, behold thy servant. Sweet sensibilities of superior rank.

Fear not, I am thine as a friend, for thy father's sake.

^a Psal. ii. 7, &c.—xxii. 16, &c. Mal. iv. Matth. vi. 9, &c. Heb. xiii. 8.
^b Verse 29 of our Chapter. Chap. xvii. 27.

With much more to the like good purpose. Thine own property thou shalt have, and my bread, or meals, thou shalt eat, as long as I live. Admirable view of grateful remembrances ! Liberal and tender heart ! Mephibosheth was the grand-son of a cruel causeless enemy, but in him David sees nothing of that sort. How God-like ? Revenge ever argues a low contemptible mind. To rule the spirit is prime heroism.

Perhaps Jonathan's lineaments shone out endearingly from the face of his son. If not, how remarkably are Shimei's words confuted^a. Be thou as a child of my own. Princely munificence^b ! No stoic verily, but all in the true nature of compassion. Jesus wept. An idea full of comfort still.

Mephibosheth's return is humble and captivating : What is thy servant, &c. Dead dog may have been proverbial to denote unworthiness. Ziba, the servant of Saul, is next called upon, and recompenced. Thou therefore, and thy sons, &c. The more remarkable that he had a vast family. May the faithful and attentive be ever thus rewarded. Mark his politeness, verse 11.

XXXII. DAVID AND HANUN.

Chap. x. 2. *Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the Son of Nabash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon.*

TO have evil returned for good is a sore trial to the best of minds ; and such had David now to combat. Upon the death of his neighbour prince at Ammon, he sent messengers to comfort Hanun, his son, whose people judging of Israel from themselves, did suspect them of treachery, and gave them abuse. The young king does not hinder this.

David, suspecting nothing so barbarously ungrateful, felt the shame done to his servants, as more directly pointed at himself ; and did meditate revenge, but not of the sudden. The

^a Chap. xvi. 6.

^b Psal. xxxv. 11, &c.

aggressors prepare for war, and to ruin Israel by a vigorous effort. A fit opportunity to make manifest former prowess, and to extend the empire. Accordingly he sent Joab, with mighty men to oppose the invaders, and gave suitable instructions ; himself taking the lead of one corps, and all after prayer.

The speech, though short, was weighty, and comprehensible by a multitude. They had upon their side, national honour, self-defence, freedom and laws. The ungrateful, besides, are ever the most cruel ; hating so much the more that they causelessly afflict.

True warrior qualifications are, courage, patriotism, piety, and a good cause. Order and presence of mind are essential, which dwell not with the fierce. One rash act may undo every thing. Wisdom is better than strength ^a. People closely united by place, intimacy and religion become powerful ^b. How animating ? How forcible ?

David's two generals drew near to the enemy, thus supported, nothing could stand before them. Hirelings fled with their chief instigators, and the heroes return. David completes the rout. A good lesson to nations in all time coming, to be just and devout.

XXXIII. DAVID'S BASE CRIMES.

Chap. xi. 6. *And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David.*

ONE would be almost tempted to wish, if lawful, that certain bad examples had not been recorded ; but truth doth honour to sacred history. GOD would have the deliberate crimes of those who have been good, upon the whole, written for a warning to all future ages, together with the deep and solemn repentance which did follow.

In spring season, and when war was not to be carried on, David sent forth Joab, with a large host of Israel, to destroy the Ammonites who had causelessly and cruelly injured his

^a 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

^b Psal cxxii. 5, &c.

people. In particular, to besiege their capital, Rabbah. Being at ease himself, and hearing of their success, he met with a temptation, and was not religiously prepared against it. Taking cool air upon the battlement of his palace, or from one of his chamber casements open, he saw the wife of Uriah bathing, and conceived for one so beautiful as she appeared a strong criminal desire. As one vice usually brings another, this, if yielded to, must injure at once the honour and property of a brave military officer. Other specious but most unjustifiable means he made use of. They bear not well a public rehearsal. Uriah's motives all along were equally devout and brave; his people exposed, a superior's command, and above all, the ark of God in the field. As thou livest, and my soul liveth, I will not go home. It is hard to say, how far people once begun to sin, will go on without a stop. Certain crimes in particular do war against the soul ^k. David called Uriah into his presence after a most familiar manner, and did even intoxicate him; but not so as to answer his purpose.

The last dreadful stage of the king's iniquity admits of no comment. In cool of the morning Joab, captain-general, has a written order sent him, to place his brave officer where he would be next to certainly slain among the first. Clear meditated murder under manifold aggravations.

All is permitted to render the best watchful and abhorrent of sin when first conceived. David proceeds to dissemble, and then marries her whom he had debauched. Vile stretches of power. Let not this displease thee, for the sword devoureth one, as well as another: She too, in transgression with David, must play the hypocrite, and mourn. Ah, detestable sensualism! So after seven long days formality David sent and brought her home to become his wife. An affair, in all its parts, highly displeasing to the LORD.

Looking back upon what has been gone through, we mark, as has been said, the common progress of vice from heart to practice, and from practice to death ^l. Happy they who regulate their bodily senses as they ought. To flee from corrupting scenes argues true fortitude. Hate vain thoughts, and

^k 1 Peter ii. 11.

^l Psal. i. 1, 2. Jam. i. 14, 15.

turn to what is good. Love and ponder well the divine law, where are great and noble varieties. Examples of the best are not standard rules; that of CHRIST excepted. Bring repentances to mind, how bitter and lasting, like Psalms xxxii. xxxviii. li., and then let candour speak. Rich grace alone, even then could save him.

XXXIV. NATHAN'S PARABLE.

Chap. xii. 1. *And the LORD sent Nathan unto David; and he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.*

IT is a delicate matter to rebuke transgressors in high life; yet are their bad examples peculiarly hazardous. Bring to remembrance here Ahab, Herod, Herodias, and others. Nathan is taught how to speak for David's conviction, and is a wonderful pattern of mildness with its efficacy: justly admired through all ages. Each part of his parable however does not require a particular application being simply ornamental. In whole, it does better to be read than commented upon.

The attack is oblique, and therefore masterly. He who had transgressed is obliged to condemn himself ^d. The rich and the poor, in our subject, denote David and his faithful officer Uriah. The servant, in virtue at the time by much the king's superior. His fidelity in marriage seems to be pointed at, in opposition to illegal multiplication. The ewe lamb was unto him as a daughter. Tenderly sweet! Straggling affection is brutal, boundless! Force is their ultimate law. David's anger is instantly roused by such an idea. As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall die. At once thief and murderer.

Upon the whole, a noble equitable disposition! The oath might have been spared, and the punishment less severe; yet was his warmth honest ^e. Thou art the man! Few and forcible words, and applied also in fit time. Impure indulgences

^d Matth. xxi. from verse 34.

^e Exod. xxii. 1.

had made him blind for a time ; at least not quick of apprehension as ordinary ^f. Plainness with decency are observed by Nathan. He uses no provoking epithets. Perhaps a moment's time was left the monarch to reflect ; horror and astonishment would admit of a fair hearing of what follows : Thus saith the LORD GOD, &c. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandments, &c. ? Thou hast killed Uriah, &c. Each of them great aggravations. Now be this known unto thee, the sword, and so on. In the blood of thy sons shall be written the trespasses of their father, &c. Behold, thus saith the LORD, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, &c. Such evils he would permit, is all that is meant by raising. So doth the judgement run.

The best now in David's power he doth return ; I have sinned against the LORD. He attempts not to palliate, and far less to excuse. Grief and compunction would admit of no easy utterance. He is in this space quite inconsolable ! Thou shalt not after all die by an immediate stroke of divine justice ; but the child that is thus born unto thee shall do so soon and surely. Before this awakening, therefore, months must have passed, which is terrible to think of. How all that time could he worship God, infinitely just and pure ? A mission of grace next to miraculous was needed to restore him. Ah, how hardening is carnal vice ! Wo must be to them that live carelessly ! It is a kind of death to what is good. A David overcome should make every one tremble ^g.

XXXV. DAVID'S SUBMISSION.

Chap. xii. 19. *But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead : therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead ? And they said, He is dead.*

DAVID is now about to suffer one domestic trial, by way of prelude to greater, on account of his late aggravated crimes. His base born child, and a special favourite, was

^f Hos. iv. 11.

^g Prov. xxviii. 14. Matth. v. 3. Psal. xviii. 21, &c.

taken

taken mortally ill. Hoping however, that the divine threat might be conditional ; he besought the LORD with earnestness for his recovery, and could not be prevailed upon to eat what was understood to be sufficient. Both of them agreeable to true nature, and a relief in part to sore affliction. While there is life there is hope.

Discerning from those who were nighest to his person that the child had expired, though none of them had courage to tell him ; the monarch would have the whole laid open, and then, to their surprise, changes his manner of acting. God's will is now clear, and he most devoutly submits, verse 20. David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed, &c. The house of the LORD is his prime resource. He then had food set before him, and did eat. His court and other intimates astonished, said, What new thing is this ? and so on. His wise instructive return was worthy of much attention, verse 22. Wherefore should I fast ? Can I bring him back again ? &c. I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me. Great words, when under the full belief of a future state ! Yet was the law in comparison, but a shadow of better things to come.

It is allowable to weep and fast while sorrowful events are in dependence. JESUS consoles the mother in distress. Weep not any longer. Adorable lenity ! So doth he take the sorrows of Martha and her sister Mary well, and even wept at the grave of Lazarus. Submission in tears is graceful. It is enough that the disciple be as his master. What is naturally grievous must be felt. Apathy is the reverse of virtue.

Depend upon GOD to the last. Who can tell whether he will be gracious to me ? Hezekiah, afterwards, had a like certification and did recover. To distinguish always between what is conditional and unconditional is not in man. Wait the issues with patience and trust.

Supposing deaths to be premature, as said by some, it is wise to ask with David, can I bring him back ? What claim have the very best to miracles ? How much more becoming to suffer ? To be dumb at least with silence. More than simply dying, or dust to dust, is the lot of all good people.

They

They part to meet, and in better regions. CHRIST will never say unto them, depart from me; but where I am, there shall ye be also. Sublime spiritual tempers must rise in the scale of existence. Such is the will and gift of God ^g.

XXXVI. DETESTABLE AMNON.

Chap. xiii. 13. *And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee.*

THESE are the words of Tamar, to one quite abandoned, and a near relation too. His name is hateful even as his crime was. How hideous an abuse of power is it to corrupt the young. Those in wealth and rank are oftenest chargeable, and make too many servile imitators. An insult upon manhood. Seek not to render the weak wretched, but be their guardians. Do not so, my brother. Fortitude and pure affection constitute bright eminence.

Sensualism is barbarous; leads to unnatural familiarities. Often to dismal ends, and horrors yet more undescribable.

What a disgrace to the true Church of God! As one of the fools of Israel. The worst of them all ^h. A temple of idol-worship would suit them better ⁱ. They that are after the flesh do mind only, or chiefly, the things of the flesh.

To reform is not impossible, but peculiarly difficult. And I, whither shall I make my shame to go? One early guilt may in some measure be chargeable with all the rest. Is this a matter of ease to think of? Repent forthwith, and pray without ceasing. Even chief sinners have been forgiven ^k.

^g 1 Thess. iv. 13, &c. Heb. vi. 12 John xvii. 24.

^h Matth. xviii. 6.

ⁱ Gal. vi. 6, 7. Rev. xxi. 8, 27. Matth. v. 8.

^k Matth. xi. 28.

Isa. xlii. 2, 3.

XXXVII. ABSALOM BROUGHT UNTO THE KING.

Chap. xiv. 4. *And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king !*

AFTER the death of Amnon, by another unnatural son, Absalom, this last fled from the face of his father. Joab interposes to reconcile them, and is successful. The narrative is curious.

A wise woman of Tekoah, where it is probable Absalom dwelt, is made use of as an instrument. Into her mouth he put a parable, feigning herself to be a deep mourner. After a most respectful obeisance, she said, Help, O king ! And he, full of compassion, encourages her to speak. She aggravates the causes of her misery at large. One of my two only sons slew the other, will you save the survivor from the wrath of his family nighest connexions. We will destroy him, say they, as a nuisance, and as law directs. An affecting contrivance !

Without taking time to think of a similar case in his own family ; he determines upon an instant reprieve at least, if not a pardon. Go, and I will give "charge concerning thee. Yet words so general would not put her off ; and her art of address becomes still more conspicuous ! Therefore a grant for her son's safety is made in clearer terms. Her importunity in the end succeeds quite. She must have an oath emitted. And the king, full of compassion, refuses not even so bold a request. As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth. By no means vindicable. And now the artifice is over.

One word more she insists for, and applies the sentence to Absalom's case. He is thy sole righteous heir, and the hope of Israel. Law would indeed destroy him. But as in the case before gone through, pardon may be had. Enough to parental feelings, if not to strict law. David's son was a favourite,

and this both she and Joab well knew. He did murder indeed, but it was in revenge of a sister's honour. Taken together with a banishment past, the matter is made up, the delight of both king and people is restored.

Yet patience and more time would have better become a supreme ruler of Israel. The conclusion is taken from death, verse 14. Like water each, soon sucked up, and never more to be seen. Why hasten that which comes apace? Weak, as applied here, but tender. Ought not all deliberate capital offenders to suffer?

Wishes in a judge are no ground for lenity. God himself is no respecter of persons^a. In the woman's art, Joab soon comes to be discerned. This too, she handsomely acknowledges. Though restored to the royal city, Absalom is not yet restored to the royal presence. After two full years, the heir in law becomes impatient, and is even ungrateful to Joab his friend. Proud at heart and passionate. Let me see the king's face, or let him kill me? Fierce as a monster! And fit, after some few civilities, to conceive a horrible design of rebellion.

The proud, from external beauty, have much to guard against. Check the first risings.

XXXVIII. ABSALOM'S REBELLION.

Chap. xv. 31. *And one told David, saying, Abithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Abithophel into foolishness.*

ABSALOM, now reconciled to his father^b, meditates and sets on foot an infamous rebellion against him. Lost to all sense of ingenuity, he, to outward agreeable looks, prepares whatever would attract popular regard, like chariots, horses, &c. By fair speeches and courtesies, he wins over multitudes, to set the nation in an uproar and to shed blood. He promises great things, both for public and private advantage.

^a Rom. xiii. throughout.

^b Chap. xiv. 33.

Thy matters are right, and so on ^e. Oh that I were judge, and had power equal to my inclination, for usefulness. Then he would take them by the hand, and kiss them. A stealing measure, and continued day after day. Thus did he gain over a large part of the city. After which, under cloak of religion, he seeks leave of his father ^a, to go and pay a vow to the LORD, in Hebron. Hideous dissembler!

Leave is given him, nay he is encouraged. He went, but not in a direct road; sending spies before him, throughout all the tribes of Israel, and giving them signs how he would act. Parricide arms wereto succeed an affected devotion! Accursed abuse! What will not the rebellious do? By counsel of Ahithophel, the Gibeonite, he gains over more. Thus he became strong. The engagements made to David's late great servant must have been high, perhaps that of succession next to himself. How dangerous is it to move so much as a single step out of the right way? A gift doth blind the eyes.

At length the dreadful matter would no longer conceal. David is informed ^b. The first thought is to flee with certain of his servants, from a sure attack to be made upon the capital. So the king went forth, &c. A magnanimous Hittite, and insured to his service by various ties, urges him to pass the brook of Kedron! An affecting sight! And which did move the whole country round.

Some did urge the symbolical ark of GOD to be carried along with him, by way of preservative, which David piously and humbly did decline; saying, If I shall find favour, &c. Behold, here I am, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. Sweetly, and nobly devout! Go, Zadoc, thou and thy sons consult the divine oracle, and bring me word. They did so, when one told the king that Ahithophel was among the conspirators, and moved him ^c to pray, O LORD, turn the counsel of Ahithophel to foolishness ^d. Accumulated wo verily!

On the top of Mount Olivet, the pious afflicted monarch worships. Ever to him a relief past utterance! By means of Hushai, he uses a measure allowed in war, to act as spies, and thus defeats the counsel of Ahithophel.

XXXIX. SHIMEI CURSETH DAVID.

Chap. xvi. 7. *And thus said Shimei, when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial.*

DAVID, now encamped in the wilderness beyond Mount Olivet, is met with an handsome, seasonable present from Ziba, servant to Mephibosheth, the only remaining son of Saul, and lately much obliged to him. A bottle, then, might be a cask of wine. Most likely his design was to impose.

Yet the bait took, and in his haste the king swore over Mephibosheth's inheritance to Ziba. Rash and not to be excused. The irritations of a troubled mind may alleviate, however, in part. The absent should be allowed to vindicate themselves. Hear the other side is a common and just proverb.

Once more David is to be tried, while yet in sore grief, when he came to Bahurim, which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin ^a. Thence came out one who was of the family of Saul, named Shimei; cursing the monarch in great wrath. Him the guards would have killed, but could not obtain leave. No words could be more provoking, none more reproachful. Yet would not the royal master allow the criminal to be touched. Let him alone, he has divine permission: all the import of, said unto him. Admirable self-command! Nor are the guards to be unadmired, as to their zeal and discipline. Wrath is a short madness, and he that hath rule over his own spirit, is better than the mighty. True human grandeur. Think of CHRIST, when he was crucified ^b.

Leave vengeance to him who is Omniscient ^c. Pure glory is not hurt by profligate words. Do well, care not what they say. Divine assimilation ^d. Patience, humility and respect for GOD, are illustrious virtues. Honour is due to what the ALMIGHTY permits. Yet are not crimes hereby justified ^e. The worst may become penitent.

^a Chap. xiv. 16. ^b 1 Peter ii. 21, &c. ^c Jam. i. 20, &c. Rom. xii. 14, &c.

^d Matth. v. 44, &c.

^e Jam. i. 14, 15. and verse 1, &c. of our chapter.

XL. AHITHOPHEL OVERTHROWN.

Chap. xvii. 4. *And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel.*

THE crime of rebellion is ever accompanied and followed with manifold sore evils ^a. That of Absalom was peculiarly aggravated. Hushai, as a spy, therefore, is allowed by the royal parent to join him. He has it in charge particularly to counteract Ahithophel.

Such employment, if defensible at all, is most hazardous. Ahithophel seeks commission, with twelve thousand chosen men, to attack the king when his forces were few ^b, and weary. This pleased Absalom, and all the elders of Israel. Hushai's foresight and counter action was signal ^c. Behold, he is hid, &c. I counsel that all Israel be yet more generally gathered, &c. Moreover, we may have hopes, &c. This counsel was preferred to that of Ahithophel, God so overruling, to punish the unnatural.

Hereby David gained new accessions to his army; dispatches being issued to that effect. Two of them are wonderfully preserved, and rehearse the whole of matters as they stood with Absalom; when the king arose, and took a wise advantage.

And now Ahithophel, the proud, the ambitious, finding his counsel set at nought, and himself at the point of ruin, runs with speed to it, by means of his own desperate hands! Guilt audacious in the extreme. How much better, not to have been born? Let us beware of those passions which easiest lead to a deranged state. That which is the hand of God, God will pity.

Then David came to Mahanzaim ^d in the tribe of Gad ^e, met by Amasa, captain-general of Absalom's army, an Ishmaelite, but convert to the true faith, who was soon completely defeated ^f.

^a Rom. xiii. throughout.

^b Verse 2, &c.

^c Verse 7.

^d Verse 24.

^e Chap. ii. 8.

^f Verse 28.

XLI. BLESSED JUDICIOUS LOYALTY, ABSALOM OVERTHROWN.

Chap. xviii. 3, &c. *But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us; therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city, &c.*

AT a time when Absalom did least suspect, and the officers of his father's army were charged to deal gently with him, which was more than he deserved, the battle did commence, wherein the unnatural rebel was slain. As to the manner, this seems to have been by a clear judgement of heaven. David is absent, at the earnest solicitation of his gallant officers, saying, thou art worth ten thousand of us, to the public welfare.

Yet stood he by the gate-side, or principal entry to the capital, encouraging the people as they went out, and urging still that Absalom should be spared. Here the father shines forth, with vain hope it might be of amendment. Israel and Judah are now made use of by way of distinction between David and Absalom's armies.

It was nigh to the wood of Ephraim, where the battle was fought, and whither the chief rebel fled, after his defeat. The slaughter of Israel, in an adjoining plain, became immense, from the suddenness and violence of the on-set; and the wood itself became fatal as the sword. Here Absalom hung by the hair, his late pride, and Joab slew him; not from disrespect to his royal master, but to save further blood and trouble to the state.

Then did the gallant officers blow a trumpet of victory, to prevent further slaughter. So, spare the citizens, said Cæsar, after the death of Pompey. This is real heroism. To prevent pain to David, the body of Absalom was cast into a great pit, and covered with stones ^a. His death was merited, which yet paternal affection could not all at once suffer to be thought of ^b. Better had the detestable name been buried with him-

^a Deut. xxi. from verse 18.

^b Verse 18.

self. The worst are desirous of survivancy one way or other. Much more the good. A proof of immortality.

Joab wisely forbids Ahimaaz to go in haste to the king, with news of victory. He must be prepared for the death of a son, however worthless. A mixture of extreme joy and sorrow at once, is what few are able to bear up under. The fate of Absalom is first left to rumour, and an increase of evidence. Then full leave should be given, verse 24. All is well. The LORD be blessed ! But the king said, verse 29, is the young man well ? Is Absalom safe ? Ahimaaz prudently shifts an answer. David however, will not be put off ; and Cushimore forward explains the whole ; thus politely introducing himself, May all that rise against the king be as he.

Unable now for a more minute inquiry ; he went up to his chamber, and wept aloud, saying, O my son Absalom, &c. Short and pathetic ! Would GOD I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son ! Pardonable excess ! Taking in another and better world.

XLII. DAVID CEASETH TO MOURN.

Chap. xix. 5. *And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons, and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines.*

THE remonstrance here made was just, though it might have been more mildly expressed. Time and circumstances however are to be thought of. Absalom had been too much a favourite, and the occasion of much unnatural bloodshed. The safety of a land was matter of high consideration, and faithful servants were to be rewarded with exemplary joy.

All this was properly felt, and David arose and spake as became him. He sat as before, in the public gate ; and the people came to congratulate him on their late success. Certain of Israel, notwithstanding, began a new mutiny ; fancying

ing, it may be, that they could not have a pardon; whereas this whole chapter shines with a contrary noble disposition.

Messages of forgiveness are sent by the priests Zadoc and Abiathar. The elders of each tribe were to be assured, and even Amasa to be preferred, who before this, had been in high favour with them. God do so to me, and more also, verse 13, if thou be not captain of the host! Perhaps too rashly unmindful of Joab's services.

David returns, and is met by congratulating multitudes at Gilgal. Here the affronts of Shimei seem to be forgotten; when he said, let not my lord impute iniquity to me, or punish, &c. O remember it not. All signs of upright penitence. In me, let the whole of Israel behold thy clemency. Abishai is indignant, and would have him executed forthwith. But David was otherwise minded, saying, I will have none put to death with my knowledge, in a day like this of general joy, confirming his royal word with a solemn oath.

Next came Mephibosheth, the grand-son of Saul, who had been much misrepresented by Ziba, in dress of deep mourning, whom David kindly addresses. Behold me now, said he, dispossessed of thy former regal bounties, &c. Unwilling, after all, am I as yet to trouble you. Submission and trust are what I owe. Admirably polite, as well as forcible. The promise rashly made to Ziba could not but be brought to the King's remembrance, and is not complained of.

Barzillai next presents himself, who had been of signal service to David in early life, verse 31. And the king said unto him, come thou over with me, and I will feed thee as myself. The reply is affecting, verse 34. How long have I to live, &c. Thy servant can now but imperfectly taste what I eat, &c. Nor can I hear with relish the voice of singing men, &c. Wherefore then be a burden to my LORD? I will, with permission, go some little way further, &c. Then I pray for leave to return, that I may die in peace, &c. I commend, however, to my lord, the young and excellent Chimham, &c. Admirable courtesy, with great presence of mind! No wonder that David was much affected by it, saying, Chimham shall indeed go over with me, &c. Good measure, verily, pressed down

down, and running over. An amiable pattern for obligers and obliged, in every age.

XLIII. THE CONSPIRACY OF SHEBA.

Chap. xx. 2. So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri : But the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jôrdan even to Jerusalem.

THIS chapter exhibits many examples of vice peculiarly aggravated, and denominating the authors after the Hebrew manner, men of Belial. Certain of the tribes of Israel murmur against that of Judah, after the defeat of Absalom ; and if possible, either to unthrone David, or put him to death. Sheba was their chief. Magnifying apparent evils, and seducing by fair promises, was soon followed by them. At first, they kept the affair secret, and afterwards blew the trumpet of war. Then the king, who had appointed Amasa his captain general, gives orders for collecting some of his most trusty men for opposing them. This stung Joab to the quick, who had been late royal favourite, and who from that moment did conceive a deadly revenge upon his rival, and after a treacherous manner did soon execute the same.

David is alarmed at the delay which this affair did occasion, and sent Abishai, next in command, to make inquiry ; and as soon as might be, to prevent Sheba's further progress. As for Joab, he went uncommanded, with chosen troops, to defeat the conspiracy. A motive of affection for his master might lead to this, and others, though in their nature less vindicable. This he did accomplish at famous Gibeon, and not far distant from Jerusalem. A strange mixture of character, verse 15, &c. A singular event put an end to the struggle, at the siege of Abel, by an artful woman, verse 22. She went unto all the people, &c. And her wisdom was successful with them. Sheba's head is cast over the wall to Joab, and the trumpet of peace was blown. The chief rebel deserved his fate.

David

David had an opportunity given him, too, to be convinced of his rash promise to Amasa ; though the revenge taken by Joab was dreadful. At length the whole kingdom is established. How much evil, both public and private, may one single wicked person be the occasion of ? Happy land, where there is good means for bringing such to justice. Likewise, where heroes are found to support the laws. Fear God, honour the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change.

XLIV. THREE YEARS FAMINE.

Chap. xxi. 2. *And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them, (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites, and the children of Israel had sworn unto them ; and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah :)*

DIVINE judgements, under a temporal dispensation, were often clearly explicable ; especially those of a public nature. Want of bread, from whatever cause, is a sore scourge, when long continued. This was what now led David to inquire of the LORD ^a. His answer was the slaughter of the Gibeonites by Saul, and approved by his subjects, contrary to solemn national oath ^b. Vengeance delayed becomes the more tremendous.

Devisers, and consumers of the people only were to be delivered up, to suffer death in Gibeah. To which, as most equitable, David did consent.

By this time, the Amorite remnant had become true believers, when Saul put so many of them to death, who had right to worship in Israel. From place, and time of execution, the lowest of the people might be made to understand. Hence, the ALMIGHTY was reconciled, and needful rain did fall in great plenty. No offence is taken at Rizpah's conduct, being a mother ; but rather imitated as natural. Bones and ashes are all buried.

^a Num xxvii. 21.

^b Josh. ix. 3. &c.

Even to the dust of foes, indignation ought not to reach ; and that of good ancestors is peculiarly dear'. Though famine did cease, yet did not David's troubles. He must abide another new chastisement, on personal accounts, from war, verse 15, &c. Philistines invade with extreme fury, and the king becomes faint, but is heroically rescued. A good lesson at such an age, not to hazard himself in the field. 'Thou shalt go no more out with us, &c. 'The light of Israel is too precious. Sweetly loyal and just, chapter xviii. 3.

Battle after battle ensues, to carry on the king's penitence, and still he is delivered. He and his people, too, mutually strive in affection. A king of his people, and yet a father. How like a case to our own ?

XLV. A PSALM OF THANKSGIVING.

Chap. xxii. 1. *And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song, in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.*

CLOSS successive victories have a peculiar claim to devout gratitude. The figures in this psalm are so noble, as not to be met with any where else. We have only room left to admire. David seems to have taken in one view, whatever God had done for him, verse 1. He alludes, verse 2. to heights of munition, whither he often fled. The heaping up of metaphors show how entire his confidence had been, and with how much success. Still he continues, verse 3, his trust. Salvation equally defensive and effective. Without him, no armour can be sufficient ; but himself is quite enough.

Prayer leads to praise, verse 4 ; and past experience to both. Frequent waves may alarm, but through grace shall not overwhelm me. The brave know not what it is to falsify. They are not insensible. The sorrows or cords of death leading to the grave, I dare to face. God has means for deliverance, whilst he has use for his willing servants, verse 7, &c. Omni-

science hears, and will answer. Earthquakes themselves are awful, but not annoying, verse 8. Nor similar noise made by multitudes. What shakes pillars does not overthrow them. Thou hast celestial artillery at command ^a. Lightenings come like arrows from the dark cloud, verse 15.

At the eruption of volcanoes, channels of the sea are laid open, verse 16. Miraculous often are his deliverances, even in opposition to water-spouts, or force of cruel foes, verse 18, &c. Jehovah's goodness doth often prevent or surprise, in heavy afflictions. Large room is given for action, and enjoyment. Uprightness thou wilt favour, expecting nothing higher, verse 21, &c. To this all may and ought to attain. His invariable measure.

XLVI. PIOUS GRATITUDE AND TRUST.

Chap. xxii. 31. *As for GOD, his way is perfect ; the word of the LORD is tried : He is a buckler to all them that trust in him.*

THERE are times, when personal integrity may be avowed before God, and as an humble ground of hope. Uprightness is the height of human perfection. His idolatrous enemies were widely different, verse 26.

Pity and aid as human wants may require, and according to power. In public life, more than any other ^b. God, in the end, will be every way equal to his promises, and even more. Purity of intention and practice among men is what he delights in. Holiness is the sum of all excellence.

The froward are deceitful, and ensnaring, sooner or later they will be exposed as hateful ^c. The frequency of these things will not deny. On the other hand the afflicted good, God will save, verse 28, in their devout unfeigned humility ^d. God, as a lamp, doth shine through encompassing adversities. None so dark, but he is able to penetrate ^e. Divine

^a Psal. xxix. throughout.

^b James ii. 13.

^c Psal. vii. 11, &c.

^d Luke i. 51, &c.

^e 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.

suggestions do then often occur. Few, if any devout, but have had like experience ^a. His way is perfect, both as to counsel and procedure, though at the time inextricable. He is a sure buckler to all them that trust in him ^b. Like gold, notwithstanding, they may be refined ^c. A rock of loftiness inaccessible by foes ^d.

Military prowess and devotion go admirably well together ^e. Perfection and success are from above. So courage and zeal. A very shield of salvation, and in the most hazardous cases. Just and sublimely poetical. The LORD liveth, blessed be my rock, &c. It is all of him, and no merit of mine.

XLVII. DAVID's WORDS OF FAITH.

Chap. xxiii. 1. *Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the GOD of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.*

THE king and prophet at this time could not be far from his latter end. Whence his pious patriotic expressions are admirable. The spirit of the LORD JEHOVAH, thus spake by him.

He that ruleth, &c. Or, according to some very ancient interpreters, be thou ruler; applying them to the MESSIAH. So the Chaldea paraphrase in particular.

The first grand property in a ruler is, that he be just; acting agreeable to law. Arbitrary will is, for most part, intolerable, and always a sore trial to virtue. The fear of Omnipotent Holiness is a fit check upon high rank; it leads to divine filial assimilation; the best support to both public and private good. Truth by such is soon and affectionately discerned, as the light of the morning, &c. How beautiful? How cheering to all around? So are the mild and faithful in rule.

The above, in point of agreeableness, added to the tender

^a Verse 30. Chap. v. 6, 7.

^b Heb. xiii. 5.

^c Verse 32.

^d Deut. xxxii. 4.

^e Verse 34, &c.

grass shining, is not to be exceeded. Dews from summer heat, are likewise signally beneficial. The earth all over seems then to laugh and sing, even as ancient Eden-sweetness did ! The gardens of Elysium ^a. Give the king, &c. High and low will then be mutually serviceable, producing an abundance of peace. How applicable with what follows to MESSIAH-reign,

David's aims and measures were prevailingly good, but his faults were great ; and therefore did not his house, or family, grow as it might have done. He had a gracious covenant to rely upon, and only to terminate with the Jewish œconomy, styled therefore, everlasting. Hence all his salvation and desire, as terminating in the eternal kingdom of CHRIST ^b. A sublime view !

To part only to meet soon again in heaven is consolation verily. The sure blessing of pious parents and children, in everlasting salvation, through JESUS CHRIST. What a powerful argument ^c !

XLVIII. DAVID NUMBERS THE PEOPLE.

Chap. xxiv. 10. *And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done : and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant ; for I have done very foolishly.*

THE difficulties which occur in this passage of sacred history, require to be treated with caution. The times now appear to have been dissipated, by means of outward ease and plenty. They forget themselves, and become secure even in their vices. . David, some how or other, is tempted to number the males of his nation, who had attained to a certain age. This our translation would seem to ascribe to an actual movement of the Supreme Being, but is only to be understood as a permission ^d.

It was an adverse principle to what was right, that did move

^a Psal. lxxii. 1, &c. ^b Luke i. 32, 33. ^c Thess. iv. 13, &c. 2 Thess. i. 9, &c. ^d 2 Chron. ii. 1.

him, and the guilt most probably did consist in his having omitted a charge given ^e. And along with this that he felt himself vain, as to his national strength. He might intend besides to make a kind of capitation-tax, for private use.

Having thus erred from inattention, he is brought under conviction, saying, I have sinned greatly, regardless of that law, which was so often my delight. A too common crime, even among those who are most obliged. He then deprecates the divine displeasure. Being a man of high office, he was sure to be imitated; and thus to involve others, by sore and extensive grievances ^f. Lo, I have sinned, &c. Wise generous penitence! What have my sheep done? This people were not excusable indeed, but himself far less: and hence he so justly aggravates what he had committed. Grace is all that he has left to plead upon ^g. Hence, David brings prayer-offerings, peace-offerings, and thanksgiving ones. All shadows of better things to come ^h.

If doubts still rise concerning the above passage, these must be founded in our ignorance. We have in it an example of signal and accepted repentance, to be well thought of: a smitten heart, humbling confession, and punishment deprecated.

I. K I N G S.

XLIX. SOLOMON SUCCEEDS TO DAVID.

Chap. i. 29, 30. *And the king sware, and said, As the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress; even as I sware unto thee by the LORD GOD of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day.*

DAVID, when old, is desired to name his successor, agreeable, it would seem to the custom of those times, and

^e Ekod. xxx. 12, &c.

^f Verse 17.

^g Isa. lviii. 15. Matth. xi. 28, &c.

^h Rev. xxii. 17.

with divine permission. Adonijah, one of his sons, asserts his right ^a. He had acquired the friendship of Joab, captain-general of the army, and must have been a powerful rival. Abiathar the priest, likewise did join him.

Yet Zadoc, a superior priest, and Beniah, with Nathan the prophet, and others, all mighty men, had not so much as an invitation; and apply for counsel, to their aged sovereign, by means of Bath-sheba. He then swore over the throne, in a very solemn manner, to Solomon, her son. A deed, to like purpose, would certainly be written out, and published. Cause him forthwith to act as in my stead.

Solomon then is publicly inaugurated, and the trumpet of royal honour blown. To Jerusalem he is brought, and seated upon the throne. Then said the chief leaders, Amen. As the LORD hath been with our now aged king, so let him be with Solomon, and even greater. A truly comprehensive patriotic prayer!

Thus was Adonijah frustrated, amidst rending joyful sounds, for the anointed's life. Understanding what had happened, Adonijah did fear, and fled to the horns of the altar for protection. Here he pleads guilty, and begs his life to be made sure to him by an oath ^b. The renowned peaceful successor had too much greatness of soul not to be touched by this. If henceforth submissive, not an hair of his head shall fall to the ground, but if otherwise, he shall die. A commencement of reign truly brave and prudent! Go to thine house, let none molest thee. Magnanimous virtue!

How changeable are human passions? How different is Joab now, from what he was? Trust not in princes nor men's sons, in whom there is no stay. When priests engage themselves in evil courses, their sacred office doth but render them the more detestable. A sad symptom this of national character. Their professions and promises, in a dubious cause, ought ever to be suspected. Hearken not for a moment. Ease and honour may soon corrupt great abilities. The law once deliberately broken, seldom, if ever stops short.

a Verse 5.

b Verse 51.

L. DAVID'S PIOUS CHARGE TO SOLOMON.

Chap. ii. 2, 3. *I go the way of all the earth : be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man ; and keep the charge of the LORD thy GOD, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgements, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.*

HOW sweetly calm and instructive are these words ? In the nigh prospect of death, he studies to be useful. Be thou, my dear son and successor, strong, and shew thyself a man. Highly comprehensive ! In public life more especially ^a.

To obey God is the way for becoming brave. The law at no time must be swerved from. Words of dying friends are most impressive. All have time and opportunity for some good. These near over, what remains is due to nigh connexions. Upright and universal holiness must persevere. Social duties are apt to be overlooked, and demand prime notice to survivors.

Death shews the departing good in their proper element. They speak in the prospect of meeting, and not to be divided more. Blessed motive ^b.

Religion is an immortalizing work ^c.

LI. NATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT.

Chap. ii. 12. *Then sat Solomon upon the throne of David his father ; and his kingdom was established greatly.*

WITHOUT certain degrees of allowances for inferior means of knowledge, Solomon cannot well be defended, in his conduct towards those who did obstruct for a little, his settlement in the throne of Judah and Israel. Such

^a 1 Cor. xvi. 13. ² Peter i. 5.

^b John iv. 34. Luke ii. 32, &c.

John xiv. 1, &c.

^c 1 Peter i. 22, &c. ² Tim. iv. 6, &c. Heb. xii. 2, 3.

² Cor. vi. 16, &c.

allowances supposed, with youth and political considerations, may extenuate.

As to Adonijah, his life was given to him conditionally ^a. Yet, insisting for Abishag to be his wife, means of future usurpation became, at least his probable motive, and was seen through. The art made use of did render a denial more determined. Hence too, he was slain ^b. An early state of reigning did need to be narrowly watched.

Abiathar, a late joint conspirator, was peculiarly obnoxious, from his sacred office, and yet his life is not taken from him. Get thee unto Anathoth ^c. Sweetly lenient! Mercy well timed establishes a throne. Solitude might help to assist his penitent devotions.

There are more difficulties to be answered in the case of Joab, long an useful servant to David. Of late he had been much to blame, and was powerful. At length, while overlooked, the throne was understood to be in danger, and his death determined upon. A just, it may be, but terrible piece of policy ^d. Beniah sent to execute this hesitates, but under a new command, dispatches him at the altar. It may be conceived as God's revenge against two sad murders of his ^e. The facts are fairly and simply related, and each have right to judge upon them.

Rebellion against government, and from ambitious views, is chargeable with much bloodshed.

Barzillai's character is a relief from the above. He had been of use to David, when much embarrassed, and is not forgotten ^f, but shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai, &c. Grateful dying words! To be read with delight. How much may children be indebted to parental goodness.

Shimei, though forgiven in David's life-time, was deemed too infamous a wretch to survive him long. Whether he might have in view, that Solomon should execute revenge is doubtful, where his pardon was sworn to. One who could curse majesty and flatter rebels did scarce deserve to live ^g. It was mild, and might be useful, to change a sentence of death

^a Chap. i. 52.

^b Verse 24, &c.

^c Verse 26, &c.

^d Verse 23.

^e Verse 6.

^f Verse 7.

^g Verse 9.

into that of confinement, with certification. His rash temper afterwards did ruin him. A good lesson to the wrathful. Startle not at scripture difficulties till they have a fair hearing. They should lead to diligence and prayer.

LII. SOLOMON BEGINS TO ERR.

Chap. iii. 3. *And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father : only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places.*

MONARCHY illimited is a dangerous form of government to public good, and of this, the Israelites were fairly told before hand. Hence God was pleased to lay down rules for those who should be in the highest rank ; one of which was, that they were not to marry with foreigners ^a. A strong temptation to idolatrous worship : nor were they to deal much in trade with Egypt, that sink of all abominations then ^b.

Solomon is early unmindful of both ^c. He married the daughter of Pharoah, and with her introduced much expensive luxurious equipage. It may be hoped, from chap. xi. 5, &c. that she became a believer in the true God, and that thus she might be of service to him in building the temple.

High places of worship, however, before this he did not decline as he should have done ; loving pomp and grandeur of elevation, as most probably did his wife, brought from the low lying land of Egypt.

These circumstances did gradually corrupt, to the destruction, in time, of pure divine love. His state of virtue is now become precarious. A special lesson to the young, to follow God fully. One act of guilt brings on another, for without permission he would himself sacrifice, and cut of place.

Yet is he not then visited with the extremity of justice ; God waiting to be gracious. By supernatural dream, he chooses to awaken him ^d. He is left to ask what he would,

a Deut. xvii. 14, &c.

b Chap. ii. 2.

c Chap. iii. 1.

d Verse 5.

and returns to this most judiciously, I am but as a little child, give me wisdom for rule and to judge.

The request pleased him who searches the heart, and is not only answered according to his word, but with an assurance of much external splendour. The conditions were at the same time superadded, that he would not abuse, but improve such benefits, by regular obedience and prayer. Qualities which afterwards, he was too much unmindful of. A memorable instructive example of human frailty in high life. In the very threshold thereof, he stumbles, but not so as to fall for ever.

LIII. SOLOMON JUDGES BETWEEN TWO.

Chap. iii. 26. *Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, (for her bowels yearned upon her son,) and she said, O my Lord, give her the living child; and in no wise slay it: but the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.*

WHAT knowledge other men gather from study and observation, Solomon had his immediate largest measure from the ALMIGHTY; insomuch, that his mind is said to have taken in a compass like that of the sand upon the sea-shore. Let the Proverbs speak for his deep insight into human nature, added to his penitent book of the Ecclesiastes, or the Preacher.

The text, and what follows, present us with a curious specimen. Harlots might be no other than such as kept houses for entertaining strangers, and not prostitutes, though liable to be suspected. One of the two mothers was certainly more deserving than the other. Infant sweetness, with a desire to suckle, do in common affect those much. Hence that strife between the females here. Dwelling under one roof made stealth more easy, from a person who had been long kept from rest. A melancholy case, and perhaps not remediable by inferior officers of justice. Being brought to Solomon, he, by a strange artifice, finds out the true mother. Words and acts of effrontery lead to suspicions, and would not escape Solomon.

He suitably addresseth both, and then makes a proposal that filled the true mother with horror. This, to his wisdom, discovered the whole. Her bowels yearned, or were hot in her, and she said, O my Lord, forbear, &c. The other is enviously cruel. Then, of the former the king said, she is the mother, give her the child, and divide it not. Pity is close conjoined with pure maternal affection. Can a woman forget her child? A glorious gift of nature they possess. No wonder that such wisdom became the admiration of all Israel ^a. And they reverently feared the king. Happy, O land, when thus wisely governed! If true mothers are so concerned for the life of a child, what ought parents to be for their eternal welfare? The value of a soul is inestimable. Affections well directed are of great use. Love children in God, and do not weakly indulge; so shall they never be lost to you. If they die early, they will be housed safe. Of such and those like them, is the kingdom of God. Their departure is a proof of immortality.

LIV. SOLOMON'S WISDOM.

Chap. iv. 29. *And GOD gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore.*

SOLOMON asked wisdom of GOD above every thing ^b, and was heard, as in our text. He is visited by all the great and learned around him. Natural objects were among the number of his studies ^c. In respect of morals, yet more important, whereof the book of Proverbs is a complete evidence. What are lost we may regret, but should submit, and be thankful ^d.

Understanding for government is a prime regal quality ^e, and what Solomon was chiefly set upon ^f.

He was peculiarly attentive to the choice of his officers, in every department, as to prudence, prowess, and the like.

^a Verse 28.

^b Chap. iii. 5, &c.

^c Verse 33.

^d Col. iii. 16.

Eph. v. 19, &c.

^e Chap. iii. 7.

^f Verse 1, &c.

Scribes, or secretaries, have high trust. Likewise recorders of facts, and skilful leaders on in war. Next come good inferior operators, verse 5.

A large household demands æconomical skill, verse 7, &c. Certain offices require a number of checks. Thus were Judah and Israel cared for, verse 20; and live in much ease. Neighbouring nations, too, were awed by Solomon's great wisdom, and were glad to bring presents, as tokens both of affection and respect, verse 22.

Hence had the king a noble scope for good comprehensive works, though his table consumption was very great. The whole together enough to try all his wisdom; and which indeed did greatly hurt his virtue. Luxury abridges both time and desire for superior employment. His animals for equipage, in so narrow a country, must have been very consumptive.

LV. THE TEMPLE TO BE BUILT.

Chap. v. 5. *And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the LORD my GOD, as the LORD spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name.*

TIME and means are now afforded to build a temple for divine worship. What was in David's heart, Solomon had the honour of executing ^a. With this view he writes to his faithful ally, Hiram, king of Tyre and Sidon; places of great magnificence and wealth. A clear proof that the scriptures throughout do exactly harmonize, as to prophecy and fulfilment ^b.

The temple was to come in room of the portable tabernacle; whence oracles of heaven were issued, and was intended to exceed every other in elegant splendor ^c. Hiram, with his people, were masters of the fine arts; nor were the last of these

^a Deut. xii. 10. ^b 2 Sam. vii. 13. ^c 1 Chron. xxi. & xxii. chapters.

to be unrewarded. Whilst their prince did rejoice, and praise the Most High, being now a proselyte to the Jewish religion. He engages for more than was even asked. The acceptance of food from Solomon, for so great a number of workmen was highly proper. A fine example of devout friendship! Wheat and olive oil were both plentiful in Judea. A levy of men was proper, not only to work, but to be instructed. Adoniram was to be their prime over-seer. The number of hewers, cutters, and burden bearers was immense, and may account for particulars quite amazing. What might not such multitudes under three hundred officers do?^d

A pattern of certain parts and treasure had been left by king David. Though external grandeur be in itself of no account with God; yet the state of Israel considered, in midst of idolatrous nations, seems to have rendered such a work expedient. A more advanced age of the human understanding would supersede this^e. Till then, the number of priests, sacrifices, and meetings, did require magnitude. A proportion of worshipping places must be determined by circumstances. The poor have a special claim. So have all for cleanliness and good order.

LVI. GOD'S PRESENCE CONDITIONAL.

Chap. vi. 11, &c. *And the word of the LORD came to Solomon, saying, Concerning this house which thou art in building, if thou wilt walk in my statutes, and execute my judgements, and keep all my commandments to walk in them; then will I perform my word with thee, which I spake unto David thy father.*

MUCH of Solomon's wisdom was supernatural, chap. iii. Hence his court was often visited; and messengers sent to him for acting as allies. Among these was Hiram, king of the two noblest mart towns then in the world, and

^d 1 Chron. xxviii. 1.

^e Jo. iv. 23, 24.

filled with the most skilful artificers. From friendship for David, he now becomes highly serviceable to his son.

By Nathan, probably the word of the LORD came to Solomon, encouraging him to proceed ; and still more, to obey divine laws. Then his signal presence would be with him and his people ^f. The temple being finished, in the space of seven years, the ark of the covenant was brought up to the city of David ^g, with priests and Levites, legally set apart. Then brought into its fixed place. Hence favourable oracles were given out, whilst professed worshippers were otherwise obedient. The kings in some sort being answerable for the people. At the commencement of each reign, a copy of the law was to be written out by them, and read once every seven years, in audience of the whole twelve tribes, by their representatives, who were to rehearse the same.

Thus God would dwell among them, in character of a national sovereign ; hear, and answer their requests. Notwithstanding, the law was neglected, from various causes. In time, both priests and people grew remiss. Magistrates did not correct, and kings themselves became shocking, as had been foretold they would. Even idolatrous worship was often set up, with its detestable sensual excesses ; so that the LORD behoved to forsake them. A tremendous prediction ! Yet imported in the gracious promise of our text.

In point of evidence, that God did forsake them proportionately to their crimes, their idolatrous ones in particular ; may be read their ensuing history, to the Babylonish captivity. Then the temple itself was left in heathen hands, as a presage of still worse, after rejecting the Messiah ^h. Now a vagabond, and yet distinct people throughout the face of the whole earth ⁱ. What an evidence to both Jewish and Christian faith ! Thank God for hope ^k.

^f 2 Chron. iii. 1. 1 Chron. xxviii. 1, &c.

^h 2 Chron. xii. 2.

ⁱ Deut. xviii. 15, &c.

^g 2 Chron. v. 2.

^k Rom. xi. 15, &c.

LVII. DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE.

Chap. viii. 12. *Then spake Solomon, The LORD said that he would dwell in the thick darkness.*

THIS dedication is, by much the most just religious solemnity we read of, either in sacred or prophane records, which therefore ought to be often and seriously attended to.

Singers were chosen from among the numerous tribes of priests, and clothed in white, to denote purity, as most becoming divine service, and in its own nature tending to elevate affection. Their musical instruments were in proportion; no less together than two hundred and eighty-eight, all as one sound, and upon the noblest subjects. At this interesting moment, the house was filled with a cloud, emblematical of God's presence, or glory, which shone from it. The priests themselves, for a time, could not stand the lustre thereof.

After this they return to their pleasant offices, of devoutly singing and playing. Then the king, standing upon a brazen scaffold, or tribunal, became more visible to all the congregation. From thence, and in view of the altar, he declared his purpose in building so stupendous a fabric; with much suitable exhortation to the people, and mingled with high devotion.

Darkness, succeeded with sweetening light, was at once instructive and impressive. Judgement and mercy they were now to think of; the last triumphing. Here was to be the constancy of divine national worship; and under the above belief. The emblematical dwelling of God was to be no longer ambulatory. A regular priesthood would there instruct. Also suitable relieving answers to their doubts obtained.

With such pious sentiments, he next addresses himself to the people more at large. From them again, he turned to the altar, and gave thanks to the LORD GOD of his father David, who had spoken prophetically of this solemn day. What had been in the heart of the one, the other did now fulfil.

An

An upright willing mind to that which is good, God will ever accept, verse 17. The intention is with him, as though actually performed. What a motive to devotion and liberality^l. The covenanting word of God ought to be the chief of all our joys, verse 21. A disposition the reverse argues base ingratitude. None may pretend ignorance.

The concluding prayer of Solomon, at this time, is truly admirable, verse 54. God has no equal. Though the Most High, he condescends to the lowly! How encouraging! Personal benefits may be rehearsed in devotion with great advantage^m. Certain of the divine promises are conditional, and not to be urged but by the upright, verse 27. An infinite God cannot be confined. He is every where, and knoweth all things. A sublime idea! Yet is he specially near to the devout.

To obey is better than all bodily exercises; and even warm mechanical feelings from them. The best need to be forgiven; to humble themselves, and prayⁿ. Unpardoned sin must ever obstruct prayer.

LVIII. ACCEPTABLE PRAYER.

Chap. viii. 38. *What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house.*

A Patriotic temper is very becoming those who are enlightened and devout^o. The plague here mentioned, may mean private troubles, the cause of much grief^p. His own sore, or secret moan. Or it may signify, what sincere penitents do feel, from what doth most easily beset them; by much the most probable.

Prayers and supplications may comprehend those of all kinds, proceeding from a convicted mind. To stretch hands, when

^l Psal. xli. 1---cxlii. 3, &c. ^m Jam. i. 17. ⁿ Dan. vi. 10. Psal. xcix. 5---
cxxxviii. 2. ^o Psal. cii. 13, 14---cxxxvii. 5, &c. ^p 2 Chron. vi. 29.

devoutly employed, is natural and customary. Heaven is the place of highest divine manifestation. Light inaccessible to mortals, and full of glory. Thither chiefly we must look, in firm belief of God as searching the hearts. A proper ground of solemn reverential awe.

Prayer and penitence go well together. Our own favourite sins are what there is most hazard from^c. To seek and not do is to insult Omniscience. God heareth not such sinners, so as to accept them^d.

Peculiar plagues of the heart are different in different people, and sometimes opposite, as prodigality and covetousness; credulity and scepticism; seldomer reclaimed than any other. Harlots and Publicans are easier to convince^e. God is unchangeable. Search with diligence and pray.

LIX. A PRAYER FOR PROSELYTES.

Chap. viii. 41, &c. *Moreover, concerning a stranger that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; (For they shall hear of thy great name, and of thy strong hand, and of thy stretched-out arm;) when he shall come and pray toward this house.*

BY a stranger is to be understood, a convert from among the heathens, to the belief of one only the Living and True God; the same as Proselytes. Certain of them submitted to circumcision, and became bound to obey the whole law^f. Home born Jews, notwithstanding, had a preference^g. To come among them, for God's name sake, was to do so from pure religious conviction, and for the privilege of sound worship. God's dwelling-place was that of his bright manifestation.

Hence, he would become more generally known, than otherwise. A truly catholic spirit in king Solomon. He supposes their faith to be sincere, and their worship to be fol-

^c Isa. i. 11, &c.---lviii. 1, &c.

^d 1 Jo. i. 4, &c.

^e Math. xi. 23, &c.

^f Psal. lviii. 20, 21.

^g Gen. xvii. 9. Lev. xvii. 10. Exod. xii. 48.

^h Phil. iii. 4, 5.

lowed with obedience ; though not perfect. A large extension of benevolence. Free from all sectarian narrowness, in both prayer and practice. The heart should be left to Omniscience.

The selection of Israel was with design to be religiously useful to mankind, answerable to their place in the earth, and a most splendid worship. Their history must have been much known, in particular their deliverance from Egypt and establishment in Canaan. Other kings besides Hiram would be affected. Yet more extensively afterwards. And all, only as a shadow of what will be. The settlement of Jews, in their return from Babylon, did facilitate remarkably the propagation of the gospel^d.

LX. TRUE REPENTANCE.

Chap. viii. 47. *Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness.*

HERE we have a complete account of repentance. An admirable proof of Solomon's understanding and love for his country. He supposes what might be looked for in every age, that his people would offend and be corrected for it, so as to amend.

First, they were to consider of the evils that they had done. The same as in the margin, bring back to their hearts, how foolishly they had erred. As debtors to divine justice. After-thought becomes a sinner^e. Upright grief will follow from this, and earnest supplication for mercy. God pity one a sinner, not worthy to look up.

Thus, too, is confession inseparable. Behold he prayeth. He would mention as in our text, the aggravating circumstances, or doing perversely. Words repeated, evince a

^d Isa. ii. 2. Jo. xvii. 20, &c. Rom. xi. 29, &c. ^e Isa. i. 3.

strong impression of evil, with hatred and grief. Sometimes concern will not admit of this. Particularizing in secret is beneficial.

Punishments may be lessened where repentance is but partial, but after-care makes complete work. Good fruits, with full purpose of, and endeavour after new obedience. The whole only acceptable through grace, or looking to God-ward, and now through CHRIST ^d. By the above, we ought often to examine ourselves.

LXI. SANCTIFIED NATIONAL REST.

Chap. viii. 55. *And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.*

BEING now in a state of outward ease, the Jews are directed here to be continued therein. They were to be thankful and obedient. Still binding upon all in like circumstances.

Pious national gratitude will ever rise above mere outward jovialties, though these to a certain degree are not prohibited. Mutual goodwill and moderation of bodily appetite should then be close attended to, whilst at heart they bless, praise, and magnify the LORD. Public religious exercises are then highly proper, with vows of subsequent obedience. Heathens themselves had their household deities. Family and public prayers are greatly preservative, verse 57.

A flood of ungodliness has every thing to fear, and is what outward peace doth tempt men to. Peculiarly odious in a people chosen to special privileges, and should shine as lights in the world. How pleasant is the sound of rest to those who are good, even in private life? When extended to thousands, how enrapturing? And they of the same country, the same religion! Pure pious patriotic delight. Heightened much as the com-

pletion of divine promises. An answer of peace after long and sore distress. Let Zion rejoice in her king. A grand security for continuance. The best of all legacies to future generations, and what may be rendered extensively beneficial, verse 60.

LXII. JEWISH DESOLATION.

Chap. ix. 6, 7. *But if ye shall at all turn from following me, you or your children, and will not keep my commandments, and my statutes, which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods, and worship them; then will I cut off Israel out of the land which I have given them: and this house, which I have hallowed for my name, will I cast out of my sight; and Israel shall be a proverb and a by-word among all people.*

AFTER accepting in general what Solomon had done, he is supernaturally certified, how dangerous a relapse would prove to both nation and temple. God would make them a proverb, and a by-word for wretchedness. A notable prediction, and containing in the accomplishment no small evidence for true faith.

At the time of utterance, hardly to be conceived, yet now undeniable. Think of the revolt and captivity of the ten tribes under Jeroboam *. After various warnings under Shilmanezzer, king of Assyria, they were cut off, and carried captives never to return.

As for Judah, only a few of their kings did behave better. Rehoboam himself forsook the law. Whence, he and his people were chastised by Shishak, king of Egypt. Much did the temple suffer after this. Pious Joash put things in some better order; yet himself, and his people of course, did soon transgress. Zechariah, the faithful son of a good father, stood up in opposition to both, and was stoned to death. For this the host of Syria is allowed to spoil them.

Ahaz did add to both national guilt and misery. Happily for the credit of human nature, he is succeeded by good Heze-

a Chap. xii. 28. Exod. xxxviii. 8.

kiah ; But his son Manasseh was wicked to extreme. Hence Nebuchadnezzar is let out to punish them, by burning city and temple. A most wonderful accomplishment !

Yet cured, under a long captivity, of their polytheism and idolatry, they are allowed to return, but before, otherwise enormously sinful, and were destroyed by the Romans ; and still continue a monument of divine justice, the most singular that ever was : CHRIST's blood being upon them, of that age, and their children since. Adorable extent of divine foreknowledge ^a.

LXIII. GOD's ANGER AGAINST SOLOMON.

Chap. xi. 9. *And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD GOD of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice.*

UNSANCTIFIED knowledge is much to be dreaded, as was that even of Solomon. Once wrong from sensual indulgence, he observes for a while no bounds. Personal righteousness he valued less than that of governing others. To speak and to write well with some are easy matters compared with good behaviour, especially in midst of wealth, applause, and honours, both at home and abroad.

The heart of this prince, so highly favoured in vision, is turned from the LORD his God, who became angry with him.

He might have become proud from that very support which he had given to public religion, in building and consecrating the temple. A melancholy disease, and yet incident to most ages. Both did rest in the means without pursuing the end.

Solomon would not be a little hurt, too, by the great pains he took to enrich his kingdom, and the introducing of luxuries. With Tyrian aid, he became a complete trader by the Red Sea, and Arabian Gulph to the East Indies. Wealth and perfumes, till then unknown, did abound, and a source of manifold great evils. Soon what begins with the few, doth deluge a whole land ^b.

^a Rom. xi.

^b Ezek. xvi. 49.

The prince himself became a prime misleading pattern. His train of equipage was most superb, and every thing else proportionable. How intoxicating all these? Personal voluptuousness led Solomon to what was still worse, even to an idolatrous connexion with the same. The encouraging of harlotism and multiplication of wives, was one branch of eastern pomp. Even a large degree of speculative knowledge could not resist this. Here the name of Solomon is hardly supportable. He sinks into what is most degrading! A bitterness worse than death to true penitence. A fair, but sad warning to high rank, verse 11, &c.

The revolt by Rehoboam is foretold, as a punishment of his aggravated evil, and we may hope this led him to repent^b. For David and Jerusalem's sake, he has time given him to think. Such advantage still, people may derive from pious predecessors. Predictions clear as sun-shine when fulfilled, yield a strong proof. God waiteth to be gracious. Judah was MESSIAH's tribe^c.

LXIV. AHIJAH's PREDICTION.

Chap. xi. 31. *And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces; for thus saith the LORD, the GOD of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee.*

SOLOMON had been fairly warned of what trouble would be brought upon his nation, if he and they together did not speedily amend. Some good space is allowed, but without all its proper effect. The evils which he had exemplified were various.

Whence the rebellion of Jeroboam became successful, as had been foretold, verse 29. Under Judah is comprehended that of Benjamin. An instructive view of divine providence. Solomon, in his posterity, is punished by the natural effects of his various gross crimes. Ambition of one son receives aid from the tyranny of another^d. Two golden calves render

^b See the whole Book of Ecclesiastes. ^c Gen. xlix. 10. ^d Chap. xii. 10, 11, 16, 18.

the revolt irreconcilable, as opposed to true faith, and worship at Jerusalem.

The preservation of this one tribe was to be the Lamp, or Light of the world ; by means of the MESSIAH, verse 36. How fair is the Jewish history here ?

LXV. THE ALTAR OF JEROBOAM.

Chap. xiii. 2. *And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar ! thus saith the LORD, Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name ; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.*

JEROBOAM was a crafty political rebel, and fell upon an expedient to keep his people from going to Jerusalem, for worship, by building two idolatrous altars at Bethel, and Dan ^a. A sin which soon did ruin them. They would not be warned, even by an old prophet, from their delight in new pompous sacrifices, and feasts. O altar, altar, &c. A prediction fulfilled to the letter, three hundred and sixty years after, by king Josiah ^b. Wonderful even to astonishment ! The prophet's first address was not to the prime transgressor, but to the altar personified ; and which was made, as it were, to hear his voice. And next to Jeroboam miraculously smote, and healed. Last of all, the prophet himself even persuaded, becomes to a certain degree unfaithful, and is punished. Circumstances in whole which could not be hid. Inanimate creatures will hear, when the obstinate in vice will not. They abide as witnesses. Behold the altar did rend, &c. Emblematical evidence ! Enough to awaken stupidity itself. The king, though affected, still persists. Hence came another miraculous sign. He is convicted, but doth not amend. How patient is the MOST HIGH ? He is not seen, but his instrument ; I will give thee a reward.

He who did so well reply to Jeroboam, taken in by either a real, or pretending prophet. The history is curious and

^a Chap. xii. 28.

^b 2 Kings xxiii. 15, 16, 20.

useful. Fraud covered with pious form is tempting even to the good. Thus did Satan beguile Eve. The same authority which binds ought also to loose. He survived not another day, who did offend by taking wrong advice.

God doth not require belief without ample evidence. Men have right to ask no more ^c. In the case of compiling teachers, see which of them keep nearest to the word.

LXVI. UNFAITHFULNESS TO DIVINE COMMISSION.

Chap. xiii. 26. *And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of GOD who was disobedient unto the word of the LORD; therefore the LORD hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake unto him.*

THIS man of God, upon the whole, had been disobedient in one particular, and did suffer. A warning to all future ages to be faithful. Abide by what is clear and explicit, without otherwise nicely arguing. Lay not a stumbling-block in the way of others. Even feasible temptations are no excuse, verse 8. Priestly art prevails where regal solicitude could not.

Let unequivocal pointed evidence have due regard. Stretched criticism is ever suspicious. Doubtful disputations have done a world of mischief. Dread phrases of mere human invention ^d. Imagination hath nothing to do with what God doth reveal, and hath said he will judge us by.

None ever were, or will be saved in a course of disobedience. Fear every thing that seems to favour a different doctrine. A wilful crime has no right to be termed misfortune ^e. Rash credulity is most hazardous.

^c John iii. 19, &c.—xv. 22, &c.

^d Heb. viii. 10.

^e Matth. i. 12.

¹ John iii. 8.

PART VII.

I. ABIJAH DIETH.

Chap. xiv. 12. *Arise thou therefore, get thee to thine own house ; and when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die.*

WHEREVER the ancient prophets were sent, they carried proper credentials along with them. Thus was the altar of Bethel supernaturally rent before the face of Jeroboam, in proof of what would happen to his successors three hundred and sixty years after ; his own hand at the same time withered and restored. The same way may Abijah's death be understood, with its different circumstances, chapter xiv. &c.

A prophet clearly discovers to him the Divine Omniscience, and that the success he had hitherto met and abused, was through permission from above, and would end in ruin. Even the death which did happen did not prove an effectual warning, but rather serve to harden. Restitution in particular is a difficult branch of repentance. An usurped throne he would not give up, nor withhold his two golden calves from the mad idolatrous multitude. Deplorable guilt !

Long habit becomes a kind of second nature, which may yield for a little, but doth soon relapse. It is not absolutely impossible to overcome, but for most part, like that of the Ethiopian to change his skin. Their latter end often is worse than the beginning. Youth is the season for strength in the LORD ^a.

Unjust acquisitions not only defile, but adhere like pitch. Yet knowingly to retain is to aggravate the original guilt. Give that which thou hast robbed ^b. So said the true peni-

^a Prov. i. 23, &c.

^b James iv. 8.

tent, I will restore him fourfold. Jeroboam would not amend even by the death of a favourite child, nor the accompanying miraculous signs. So did the Jews bribe the Roman soldiers, after the resurrection of CHRIST. How incorrigible both !

Infant deaths are balanced by many and great consolations. How dear are they to CHRIST ^c. So much the more, when some good things are found in them ! An early waft to immortal bliss ! Let parents follow out the like good things, if they hope to enjoy them again. A special gospel discovery. CHRIST, the first-fruit ! afterwards they that are CHRIST's, at his appearing.

II. GOD'S WORD IS TRUTH.

Chap. xvii. 24. *And the woman said to Elijah, Now by this I know that thou art a man of GOD, and that the word of the LORD in thy mouth is truth.*

IT would seem, that though the widow of Zarephath had been brought up among idolaters ; yet, when able to judge for herself, she became a believer in the One Only GOD. To favour such ingenuity, the prophet Elijah is sent to her, when the whole land was under a scourge of famine.

An affecting narrative. The prophet after much fatigue, petitions for a drink of water, and bit of bread, which, with no small benevolence, is granted. Encouraging words from the LORD GOD of Israel. The barrel of meal shall not waste, and so on. Trusting to that assurance, she promptly acts. A corroborative evidence is soon given, for they did eat many days. Yet faith, like knowledge, and every virtue, has its degrees. The son of the widowed woman fell sick, and died. Prior to his expiring, she hastily expostulates ; what have I now to do with thee, O man of GOD ? Art thou come unto me, to call my early idolatrous sins to remembrance, and to slay, in effect, my son, under my own eye ? Better both had died at once. Words not to be vindicated ; yet in some de-

^c Heb. xiii. 8.

gree pitiable. Elijah does so, and acts accordingly, give me thy son, &c. Retiring with him, who was very young, to his devotional chamber ; he cries to the LORD, with arguments of familiar nature, not in common to be imitated. He obtains a favourable answer, from him who compassionates human infirmities.

Humble submission, as to temporal concerns, ought ever to accompany earnest prayer, as in the case of our Blessed LORD ; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt ! What if the child had died, not to revive again ? None of them had any claim of right. Sanctified distress heightens divine love, and it was the prophet's duty to lead to this. But likely, supernatural impulse did over-rule ; for sake of persevering faith, as to eternity, no less than time. The child's soul came again into him. Now by this, said the mother, I know more than ever, that thou art a man of GOD, &c. and that he alone is fit to direct and govern.

In a christian view, the written infallible word of GOD is to be trusted, upon the ground of far superior miracles ^a. CHRIST alone hath the words of eternal life. Himself the first fruits ^b.

How foolish, as well as criminal, is unbelief ! Let us aim at the highest measures of faith, praying and meditating upon the excellence of scripture contents.

III. OBADIAH.

Chap. xviii. 3. *Now Obadiah feared the LORD greatly.*

THIS seems to have been a different person from the ancient prophet, who lived in the days of good Jehoshaphat ; whereas our Obadiah was prime minister to Ahab, a brutish sensual idolater ; and who, notwithstanding, retained his true faith. Yea, was great in good practice.

Reverential fear imports every thing excellent ; as prime

^a Heb. ii. 2, 3. Isa. viii. 20. Matth. v. 17.—xi. 29 ---xiii. 13, &c.
^b Matth. xxviii. 20.---vi. 33.---v. 5. Jo. xvi. ult. Psal. xxxvii. 16.

servant to a bad king ; he must have had many temptations to resist. It might be part of his engagement to have leave of worshipping occasionally at Jerusalem, whilst in private he was more frequent. His trusts were inviolably kept.

What prudence must all together have required ? What zeal of grief for worthy sufferers ? And care of them when it was in his power ? Courts do generally influence those who are nigh to them. Their example doth in some sort dictate. What hazards then must Obadiah have run ? Invincible pious hero ! His principle did strengthen, by public and private exercises of it. Withdraw these, and goodness will ever decline proportionably. If the foundation be destroyed, what comes of the superstructure ?

Nor Ahab, nor Jezebel, could charge their servant with mismanaging, or even with neglect. Fidelity then, must have had a sharp trial. Whatsoever he did, was done as unto God, and not unto men. With him, wisdom and prudence did dwell together. His religion was calm and steadfast. In bad times he knew how to be discreet.

When the LORD's prophets were in danger, he could run great risks for them^d. On their account, he disregarded both substance, and the love of life^e. In the way of duty, a degree of self praise is more than pardonable. Pious affection strengthens with age^f. To him that hath, shall be given. The very flower of obedience.

IV. HALTING BETWEEN TWO OPINIONS.

Chap. xviii. 21. *And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions ? If the LORD be GOD, follow him : But if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.*

AHAB and Jezebel were much enraged against the prophet Elijah, on account of what he had foretold, re-

^d Verse 4 ^e Jo. xii. 25, 26. Verse 12 of our chapter. ^f Prov. viii. 17.---

--- iv. 18.

lative

lative to the three years famine, who, notwithstanding is miraculously preserved. When the dreadful national judgement was near an end, the spirit of the LORD moved him to meet Ahab, and to remonstrate, which accordingly he did, by means of Obadiah, prime minister still to the king. I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, &c.

They continued to worship Baal, as their chief God, whose priests he offers to confound, at the Mount of Carmel, where, from its eminent situation, no fraud could take place. By regal order, they are brought thither in vast multitudes.

How long, said Elijah to them, do ye halt between two opinions? &c. Let the following method be taken to evince the truth. The people seem to have been intimidated by the royal presence, and did answer to the fair proposal not a word, yet seem inclinable to have the trial made. Most curious in itself and useful.

Meanwhile, if it be inquired, whence people halt, or become dubious which way of life to follow? One answer may be, that, like the lame, they find difficulty in motion at the time; danger upon one side, and strong inclination on the other.

This produces instability, or hesitating, both as to principle and practice. The more thoughtful upon solemn occasions, the more they must suffer. Few consider as they ought, that capital points carry the clearest evidence with them. As why are you a Christian? Answer, Because there is no system of doctrine and laws equal to that of the gospel. So, why live religiously and morally? Answer, Because by much the safest ^a.

What so natural to conviction, as an immediate change of life to the better? After-thought producing after-care. And to real converts, how clear are the rules of holiness? Men are not vicious from want of evidence, but from undue prepotent affection, or evil bias, owing to custom and habit. Their wishes after good become every day more and more faint. They halt less than they before did, and in the end, become hardened like galley slaves. Miserable state ^b.

^a Psal. xxxiv. 11, &c. 1 Peter iii. 15. Micah vi. 8.

^b Prov. i. 24, &c.

V. POPULAR EVIDENCE.

Chap. xviii. 24. — *And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.*

OF all other evidences to truth; undeniable miracle is the most obvious, and what the divine wisdom has ever employed. Nor judgements, nor mercies, however singular, will prevail with some, like Ahab and Jezebel, verse 19, &c.

Then said Elijah further unto the people, I even I only remain, &c. And all the people then approved. How could they do otherwise? The competition was to be a clear one, and no cure of idolatry imaginable could well go beyond it. The place was conspicuous, and where no art could be used. The Idol-worshippersthemselves were to be the first sacrificers. Yet all their endeavours were to no effect, like what Elijah's words did afterwards produce. They prayed loud and long, but had no answer. They did leap and dance, and grew angry, when the true prophet ridicules their folly. Cry aloud, and so on. Well pointed irony. They did this, and cut their bodies, to the effusion of blood, but all in vain.

Then Elijah repaired the altar of stone, the enemies of truth being invited near to see that no fraud upon his part could be, verse 32, &c. All striking circumstances in support of what would happen. Then the prophet of God prayed, let it be, &c. Whereupon the fire came down, and did consume the sacrifice. How astonishing every thing considered! And when all the people saw, they fell down, and said, the LORD, he is the One only the living and true God. But as an example of warning, the prophets of Baal are slain, and Ahab allowed space to repent. Moreover rain is promised in abundance.

Yet all these, with other miraculous circumstances do not thoroughly amend him. He would not restore what had been most unrighteously usurped. He would not suffer his subjects to go and worship at Jerusalem. What criminal hardening is here. Compare with this the manner of the Jews in the days of our Blessed LORD. Even the greatest miracles may be resisted by hideous perversion.

VI. STILL SMALL VOICE.

Chap. xix. 12. *And after the earthquake a fire ; but the LORD was not in the fire : and after the fire a still small voice.*

THOUGH GOD did permit the priests of Baal to be put to death by order of Elijah, and when the people were incensed, yet might he not have had a clear impulse from heaven to that effect. Therefore, hearing of Jezebel's sworn revenge, verse 2. He fled in great haste to the wilderness. Here he sat down much fatigued, under a juniper-tree, and in no small terror ; which led him to a degree of impatience. He reflects not what good ends there might yet be for his prolonged life, and a caution to after ages. For more service, he is miraculously preserved, for no less than forty days and forty nights, till quite out of Jezebel's reach, at Mount Horeb, where Moses, long before, had so many high honours done him.

Here, Elijah is met with three awful trials to his fortitude, after having his late rash behaviour brought to mind, palliating what he could not defend. Thus is he made fit for calmer duties. He is shewed what Omnipotence could have done in proper season, had Elijah waited for it. He had been jealous, indeed, but without a warrant. How must his fear have now been awakened ? When after the wind, was an earthquake, and after the earthquake, a tremendous fire from the clouds. Their meaning afterwards he would distinctly apprehend.

A voice as whispering did come to his ears, and seemingly from a distance, which led him to wrap his face in his mantle. And as he stood, the voice said unto him, what dost thou here, Elijah ? but the voice was still and calm. To which he answers as formerly, It was his zeal.

Hence, see how God's ways are not as ours, &c. That his will is to give space for repentance, whilst there is hope, and not like Elijah to cut off at once. From such rashness, how many cruel massacres have happened ? Let us beware of zeal without knowledge. Be not severe till every other method has been taken, and even where need is, with reluctance ^a.

^a Rom. xiv. 1, &c. Jam. i. 20, &c.—iii. 13, &c. Matth. v. 9. Rom. viii. 17. &c.

The true spirit of God in speech is still and small ^a. John Baptist had Elijah's properties without his defect, so that Herod feared him ^b.

VII. AHAB AND NABOTH.

Chap. xxi. 4. *And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken to him ; for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers ; and he laid him down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.*

THE meanest and most wretched of all slaves, are they who, like Ahab, have sold themselves in some sort to commit iniquity. They see and approve what it is not in their power to practise, and practise in direct opposition to their own light. They are held fast in their own fabricated chains.

When Ahab's ruin was meditated by Benhadad, king of Syria, God, to his own conviction did interpose ; yet was not gratefully acknowledged by him, but the direct reverse. Being at ease from war, he conceives a passion for one of his subjects' vineyards, whose name was Naboth. Being proprietor by direct lineal inheritance, he chose not to part with it, and this threw Ahab into a fever of distress ^c. The divine laws he had no regard to, but would much rather oppress. Herein Jezebel gives him every aid she could think of. He laid him down, and would not eat. How extravagant ? How detestable !

Pride compasseth him about as a chain, besides his idolatrous greed. He will not forbear to covet. A case by far too common. Money will not always answer to our mind. This should give none offence.

Both Ahab, and Jezebel, however, are displeased, and the last of them out of all measure. Perjury and murder are nothing to her. The poor man's estate is confiscated to the king. Monstrous deliberate vices ! The covetous are most inventive. Take heed and beware of it ^d. Contentment is life.

^a Isa. xlii. 2, &c. Gal. vi. 1, 2. ^b Acts iv. 32. John xiii. 17.

^c Lev. xiv. 23. Num. xxxvi. 7. Ezek. xxxvi. 18. ^d Psal. xxxvii. 18.

VIII. AHAB'S PENITENCE.

Chap. xxi. 29. *Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house.*

IT was in the view of providence to let two wicked princes, Benhadad and Ahab, punish each other. First, the king of Syria invades Israel, who are preserved for a while to be instruments of divine vengeance.

For Ahab and Jezebel's enormities their deaths are predicted, and none of them to be natural, verse 21. Ahab, hearing of this from Elijah, is much moved. He rent his garments, &c. Strong grief, but temporary, and unreforming. Such an appearance of good, however, the LORD spares for the present. Seest thou, says he to Elijah, &c. The full execution of justice is deferred.

Certain measures of repentance may alleviate punishment. How much more will real steadfast contrition obtain forgiveness! Grief is an ordinary mark of penitence, and is what reformers do first attempt. For like end, are divine chastisements sent ^a. An encouraging step, though not always certain. The smothering flax may quench, yet should not be despised ^b. Seest thou, how he humbleth himself before me? I will therefore lessen the severity of his sentence. Others may profit from this, to see what a miserable service that of sin is.

Under the gospel, upright repentance is made sure of pardon, through the one mediator ^c. How much are infidels to be pitied?

^a Psal. cxli. 3, 4.

^b Isa. xlii. 3.

^c Acts iii. 19. Luke xxiv. 47.

Isa. lv. 3, &c. 1 Jo. i. 9.

IX. MICAIAH THE SON OF IMLAH.

Chap. xxii. 8. *And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the LORD; but I hate him: For he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.*

THE kings of Judah and Israel, who had lived for some time in variance, now agree to invade the dominions of Benhadad, king of Syria, and perhaps, without much provocation. Be that as it may, they proceed some length, being encouraged by false prophets^a; and probably upon the ground of their united strength. The king of Judah, notwithstanding, wishes Ahab to consult some other; who answers as in the text.

In the worst of teaching times, there may be some who adhere to faith; such as were Elijah and Micaiah, with others not so generally known. Micaiah waited with patience, till the word of the LORD came clear unto him; after having made use of the prescribed means. He did not run unsent, like many who were about him^b.

Such, notwithstanding, as Micaiah was, are too often hated, for giving no countenance to the wicked, and wilfully erroneous! Such pure scripturalists, as we would now say, are apt, by popular flatterers, for a time, to be overborne, till JEHOVAH calls them forth. So it was with the primitive Christians, and Reformers from popery, whom subsequent ages have so justly and highly honoured, even as Micaiah^c.

His answer to the king seems to have been designedly obscure, but most like with visible signs of derision. Go, if you will, and see how you prosper. His true meaning is penetrated, and yet a little more time is gained. The measure was prudent^d. To so solemn an application by Majesty, the prophet makes a brave reply; I saw in vision, &c. And

^a Verse 11.^b Matth. vii. 15, &c.^c Verse 13, &c.^d Verse 16.

Ahab, king of Israel, said, Did I not, &c. Divine permissions are often set forth in scripture, as actually done by God, who tempteth no man to sin ^e. The present instance is a very extraordinary one. Unless the worst have permission, they have no power to execute ^f. Stubborn vice is thus punished of itself, by error upon error.

Let truth be received in the love of it, which must prevail in the end. Pure saint comfort ! In opposition to conscience, neither great nor small, are to be regarded ^g.

II. K I N G S.

X. AHAZIAH'S DEATH.

Chap. i. 6. *And they said unto him, There came a man up to meet us, and said unto us, Go, turn again unto the king that sent you, and say unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that thou sendest to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron ? Therefore thou shalt not come down from that bed on which thou art gone up, but shalt surely die.*

THE Jews were chiefly chosen of God, to preserve true religious knowledge, worship, and practice. What was miraculously done for them, could not be hid from encompassing nations. How, for example, could the three years predicted famine be unknown ? And the same way, its termination by Elijah's prayer ? With Ahab and Jezebel's deaths, soon after ? Still, notwithstanding, Jeroboam's party continued their revolt, mixing politics and false principles together.

Ahaziah, son of Ahab, is visited by two sore judgements, which led him to send messengers ^h. Baal-zebub, the god of

^e Jam. i. 14, 15.

^f 2 Thes. ii. 10, 11.
Acts xvii. 11.

^g Jude iii. 1 Thes. v. 21.
^h Verse 2.

flies, as his name imports, is consulted, and met with a public dreadful revenge, by the instrumentality of Elijah. See how little Ahaziah profited by his father's death. Thou shalt not come down, &c. So spake Elijah, and then departed, till the fate of that prince should be announced. Think with astonishment of his foolish rage. What manner of man was he, that dared of himself to meet you, and utter such words? They describe him, so as not to be misunderstood. And he said, it is Elijah for certain. Then sent he for him, by a captain of fifty; but whether in a way of menace or honour, may be doubted. It was Ahaziah's last resource, and no matter of choice.

The prophet, from an eminence, which gave an advantage to his voice, saw them approach; and by a supernatural impulse, accompanying his words, brings down fire, which did consume them. Terrible to imagine! But instructive to thousands. Not intimidated by one sad example, Ahaziah adventures upon a second similar set of messengers, who are the same way consumed.

Still the diseased prince perseveres; and happy for him, if he had sent to the prophet, for better instruction: But his bodily health is more upon his mind, than spiritual improvement.

His third messenger, however, is more modest than either of the former, saying, Oh man of God, &c. Let my life be precious in thy sight. And, from an impulse, equal to words from a visible angel, the Prophet arose, and went down with him unto the king, whom he doth boldly address, and certify of his death.

So he instantly departed life, according to the word of the LORD ^a. A convincing testimony to that land, and all around it. When those in high ranks are wicked, then is a time of much danger, from an implicit following. The rule of faith is to be close regarded ^b.

^a Verse 16, 17.

^b Matth. iii. 1, &c.

XI. ELIJAH'S ASSUMPTION.

Chap. ii. 12. *And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father ! The chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more : And he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.*

THE assumption of Elijah seems to have been designed for a certain evidence to those times, of another and better world to the good, beyond this. The circumstances then, must have been easier understood, than since. Himself, as well as his successor Elisha, must have foreseen it, as somehow or other, a speedy departure from life.

Gilgal and Bethel were both noted places for divine worship ; whence, as well as from love to his master, he would not be separated. At both places, they are also met by other prophets, who seem to have been let into the same knowledge. They are urged, not in the least to disturb their few remaining hours. All well prepared for the grand event.

Still he would have Elisha to abide where he was, till he went the length of Jericho, where, it is probable, was another prophetic school, but yields to filial affection. Here they are met as before. Elijah would next proceed to Jordan, and Elisha will not part with him. By the river they stood, as ruminating, when Elijah, with his mantle, smote the running water ; and both did pass over dry. A noted sign to the last, of his favour with God. Here he asks Elisha, what he would have done for him ? And who desires a double portion of his spirit, like that of a first-born to the father's inheritance. Not merely miraculous, but of wisdom, fortitude, and zeal, in divine service ; looking unto God as original, and to Elijah only as his instrument. If such was the will of heaven, it would be made known to him, by a sign.

Going on, and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and so on. Suitable emblems of future trials to Elisha. Then are they parted from each other, as by a whirlwind, into heaven.

heaven. Majestic vision ! My father, my father, my useful instructor. The chariot of all Israel, and the horsemen thereof. Only applicable to an active prophet, in warring days. And he saw him personally no more, but rent his clothes in grief, and took up the mantle of Elijah, which fell from him ; making use of it, as a token of the Spirit, to repass Jordan.

How extensive and clear was this evidence to Israel, of a future state ! And how must it have spread. The body, which could not be found, had been changed in the ascent. Such another immediate change to all the good at death, may happen, though not to the body, yet to a building of God ^a. They shall never die. They cease to be mortal ^b. And our Blessed LORD's ascent also ^c.

XII. ELISHA AND THE PROPHETS.

Chap. ii. 15. *And when the sons of the prophets, which were to view at Jericho, saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him.*

ELISHA, in his return from Jordan, was met by a number of pious students from the schools of the prophets, nigh to Jericho, who seem to have known what favour, and what power had been devolved upon him, and of which he soon gave confirmatory evidences. He assures them, that Elijah's body was never to be found ; which, upon trial made by the stoutest of them, was made certain.

Again, Jericho being pleasantly situated, but ill off for water ; he was moved by a simple mean, under God, to change what was brackish, into sweet and wholesome. Further, but much more grievous to think of, as he was going up to Bethel, another school of the prophets, he is met by a multitude of young people, styled children, after the Hebrew manner, who, probably instigated by idolatrous parents, did mock him, as bald-head, and no more fit to be seen than his master Elijah :

^a 2 Cor. v. 1. ^b Matth. xvii. 1, &c. ^c Rom. viii. 10. 2 Thes. i. 7, &c.
1 Thes. iv. 13, &c.

which was instantly and awfully punished. Elisha did not literally curse or imprecate, but did certify a vengeance to happen ; as in the cases afterwards, of Ananias, Sapphira, and Elymas the sorcerer. Accordingly, there came forth two she bears, which destroyed them. They might then have been just robbed of their whelps. A public, and affecting lesson to that people, as well as awful entry upon religious office ! But necessary. The correction of a few, might prevent worse. If children, they might be compensated afterwards.

From thence, Elisha went to Mount Carmel, where was another school of the prophets ; and some time afterwards to Samaria. For most part amongst idolaters, and with inferiors as to office, ready to act, as appointed by heaven, and who occasionally did foresee things to come ^a. They did also warn the disobedient, and encourage the good. In many cases, their words led to the MESSIAH ; as did those of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the van of the whole stood Moses ^b. Shews that prophet to have been a president of such college, or seminary ; whence, to the time of the captivity, there was a plentiful supply, both for the above purposes, and expounding the law ^c. Retired sons of the prophets ^d. Many of whom left no writings ; such as those of Moses, Samuel, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, &c. till the days of Malachi, when that order of men seems to have ceased ; and the new covenant introduced by John Baptist, a second Elijah ^e.

Now, by CHRIST, the worlds, or rather the ages are finished out ^f. Now Jew and Gentile are united, by infallible New Testament teaching.

a 1 Sam. ix. 9. b Num. xii. 6. Deut. xxxiv. 18. 1 Sam. vii. 6.
 c 1 Sam. xix. 18, &c. d 2 Kings ii. 3, &c.--iv. 38. 1 Chron. xxxiv. 29, 11.
 1 Kings xi. 29. Exod. xv. 20. Jud. iv. 4. e Mal. iv. 4.
 Lu. i. 11. Matth. xvii. 12. compare Heb. i. 1. f Eph. ii. 20, &c.

XIII. ZEAL TEMPERED BY DEVOTION.

Chap. iii. 15. *But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him.*

JEHORAM, not just so bad as his father Ahab had been, is refused tribute out of Moab's territory, which led to war, though apprehensive somewhat of inferiority, so that he sought aid from Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the prince, or viceroy of Edom. Without consulting the divine oracle at Jerusalem, the three resolve to fetch a compass, for surprising the Moabite, and through grounds they were yet ignorant of. Here, from want of water, they are brought into great distress.

Then, but late, they think of God ^a. By a servant, they are directed to Elisha. Jehoshaphat recollects this, and how he had erred. So they all went down respectfully to the prophet, and he, moved with zeal against idolatrous Jehoram, said, what have I to do with thee, &c.? Natural, but not mild. Get thee to the prophets of thy fathers. The king of Israel takes with the rebuke.

Elisha cools at the presence of Jehoshaphat, and yet is brave. A remain of conscious passion leads him to ask for a soothing minstrel, or skilful devout singer and player. The meek God will guide into judgement. And it came to pass, that the hand of the LORD, the same as a divine impulse, was felt by him; and he gave forth his directions for an entire conquest.

Zeal, even in good men, may be too bitter at times ^b. An awful certification. Whilst we hate error and vice; we ought yet more to be grieved ^c. *An honest grief will soon become mild. Alas for you, Scribes, Pharisees, and Hypocrites ^d.

^a Verse 10.

^b Jam. iii. 13, &c.

^c Mark iii. 5.

^d Matth xxiii. throughout, would be a just translation.

Isa. xlii. 2, &c.

Feeling a tendency towards bitter zeal, it may be proper to recollect some soothing divine celebrations as did Elisha. If God so bears with men, how ought they to bear with each other? Forgive and ye shall be forgiven ^a. Counsels of peace from God's word, ought to be much studied ^b. Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath ^c.

XIV. PAYING DEBTS.

Chap. iv. 7. *Then she came and told the man of God; and he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live, thou and thy children of the rest.*

A Poor widow woman, who had been the wife of a prophet, is left under debt, possibly owing to more than proper hospitality. She is pursued by a rigorous creditor, to have her sons for bondsmen, to work off the debt. Far from commendable, though at times permitted by law.

The widow applies to Elisha, and he hears her with compassion. He seems even to have been supernaturally moved, verse 2d. And he said, go, sell what thou hast, &c. Here is an evidence of just respect for law, even when hardly pressed. Two working sons from a *lone widow* was dreadful to think of. Incapable too, from age and grief. One may be able to lend, who has no heart. By the height of law such may injure. What in common is a good servant, has power at times to oppress. Yet rather than infringe law God would work a miracle.

A debt may be lawful though not contracted by vice, for he who was deceased was a man that did fear the LORD. This may be no excuse, but an extenuation ^d. Mere designing imprudence is not always to be condemned with rigour. Therefore doth God pity the immediate sufferers from this. And Elisha said, what shall I do unto thee? He, at the same time lifts up his soul unto God, and is answered. An affecting passage! The relief is miraculous, and yet justice must be done. Go, pay, and be happy.

^a Matth. v. 44 &c. — xi. 28. &c. Tit. i. 4, &c. Heb. iv. 14, &c.

^b 1 Tim. iv. 12.

^c Gal. vi. 1, 2.

^d 1 Tim. v. 8

Owe no man any thing, if possible. Live not above income. Misfortunes may happen the most accurate in business. Then lay open books, and find mercy. Pay if possible the balance of what was compounded for. Justice is sacred, as to both principal and interest. With wages of iniquity in one's tabernacle, how can they be happy? A good conscience is our best law. Ample restitution argues heroic excellence. Lead not thyself to be tempted. Over-borrow not. Over-trade not^b.

XV. ELISHA'S CHAMBER.

Chap. iv. 10. *Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.*

A Great part of Elisha's duty, at least for some time, was to travel from one school of prophets to another, which led him frequently to pass by Shunem, belonging to the tribe of Issachar^c.

Here lived a woman of great wealth, and given to hospitality, who did constrain him by argument to turn in to her house, at meal time. The prophet civilly complies, and afterwards puts her to less soliciting trouble. He becomes her guest unasked, as finding the family not unfriendly to his devout exercises. At length having leave of her husband, they build an adjoining chamber for him, whither at pleasure he might retire. It was both simple in itself and simply furnished. A bed, a stool, a table and candlestick. Here he was to meet with no interruption. How satisfying to think what a small matter may answer mere human necessities? Here he could read, write, and pray. His candlestick was probably a torch, or cruise for evening. A mind not burdened with the cares of life is best suited for contemplation. The hostess herself must have been devout.

Sooner or later will such meet with an adequate recompence. Bread and water for most part are far from being expensive,

^b Mic. vi. 8. Tit. ii. 11, 12.

^c Josh. xix. 12.

yet will not be forgotten. In other cases, the measures of hospitality may be various. The more ease and freedom the better. Conform to household manners while they are decent. The public have right to judge for income to their established teachers. The life of man thank God consisteth not in abundance. A little room, with necessaries will do. A most wise and gracious determination of heaven !

There is no need for choosing a recluse life with poverty. A fortune may be usefully lived up to. Exclusion from active goodness is no part of a devout turn, but the reverse. To whom much is given much will be required. A heart for pious offices will never want time. The abuse of wealth and grandeur should never be placed to their own account. Thus did not our Shunamite.

A blessed memory still, and whom God did bless. Elisha is grateful under a divine impulse. See how he spoke to Gehazi, and the person whom he did serve. Behold, thou hast been careful, &c. What is to be done for thee ? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king ? and so on. He was in high favour ever since the Moabite war. Her prompt answer shewed an happy indifference for this world. I dwell among mine own people, &c. A noble independent soul ! and Gehazi answered for her, She hath no child, and her husband is old.

Calling then upon her once more to the threshold of the door, he assures her, from above, that in the proper season from that time she should embrace a son. At first she understands this to be a jest, which is all the lie to be understood in the narrative, but afterwards, no doubt, is satisfied.

In the sight of God, pious hospitality is most acceptable. Posterity not unseldom reap advantages from it. Those of a future world are still more certain. There must all along be accommodation to circumstances.

XVI. THE SHUNAMITE'S SON RECOVERED.

Chap. iv. 27. *And when she came to the man of GOD to the bill, she caught him by the feet : but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man of GOD said, Let her alone ; for her soul is vexed within her ; and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me.*

MOST simple and tender is this relation throughout. Great was the woman verily in wealth, rank and virtue. Disinterestedly hospitable. She is rewarded by a son in her old age. The child grew up and was able to walk abroad with his wealthy father, to sheep shearing, or other like work. What with heat and fatigue he is at one time seized with a fever, carried home and died in his mother's arms. What a trial !

Yet is the devout lady so much mistress of herself, as to recollect what Elijah had done in a like case, and entertains hope from his successor Elisha. After putting the dead body in a proper place, and without alarming the greater part of her household, she orders one of her chief servants to carry her straight to the prophet at Carmel, who meets her with all due courteousness. The narrative is affecting !

It is well, for certain, said she, since God has so ordered it ; yet, I have a request to make of thee, his servant, with the most humble submission. Let her alone, said he to his servant, for her soul is vexed, &c. His words are excellent, and well becoming ! He, as every other ought, reveres the afflicted, and will hear her to the last for consolation.

A person in extreme woe is sacred. *Lactanius*. How little thought of by our blessed LORD's enemies, when he endured the cross and the shame ? To see, and weep with them that weep, is in so far giving real immediate comfort. Let her alone ! She is bitter in soul.

Then she said, Did I desire a son of my LORD ? The gift was free, and unexpected. Not quite fair it must be owned, but having much of pitiable nature in it. He who alone could give,

give, had right to take away. But bitter grief will hide this in a moment.

Then gave he his staff to the trusty Gehazi, with proper instructions. Yet did not these satisfy altogether a soul next to overcome. As the LORD liveth, and thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. Humane Elisha hears her to the last, and arose, and followed her.

Gehazi, who went before, did as he was ordained, but without success. This honour is now left to the prophet. He went in to where the child lay, and prayed for his life, having an unquestionable divine impulse to that purpose. He uses means who did not doubt of success. There is often a wise gradation in miracles, to render them the more remarkable, and certain to the world. Every movement towards a complete recovery is watched. Then said he, take up thy son. Marvellous goodness! Enlightening to a whole country! A special motive to beneficence!

Hence too, we learn the true method of consoling. God is principal all along.

XVII. NAAMAN CURED.

Chap. v. 10. *And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.*

VARIOUS methods in the course of providence are made use of to enlighten candid minds. Of this sort was Naaman, while living among idolaters. His servant maid was an Israelite, and spoke to him at times, of the One true God with success. Whether she was his as a captive, or by purchase is uncertain. Finding her master to be gentle, she embraces opportunities offered to communicate truth, and made known, far superior advantage to Naaman, the prophet of Samaria, as one who might do him service. He, being leprous, hopes for good both to his soul and body. With leave of his prince, and a recommendatory letter to the king of Israel, he goes to the prophet. Whatever might be in the letter, it was in the beginning understood as a snare to produce between them

them a quarrel, which he was then in no proper condition for, and did grieve him, saying, am I a god, &c. ?

'This being reported to the prophet, he obtains the king's permission for an interview. So Naaman comes with a numerous and splendid equipage, to the door of Elisha's house, who, unaccustomed to such things, and from reverence to the law of Moses, did not give one so infectiously distempered admittance.

Herein he exhibits a clear proof of his prophetic character, with willingness at the same time to oblige, by messengers. Go, and wash in Jordan, &c. Then return for ready access clean, verse 1. Both from respect to office, and presents, he looked for a more quick and welcome reception. He is displeased, and thinks lightly of the mode of cure, expecting prayers in place of what had been prescribed to him. Making no use of these, he sends him to cold water, understood to be rather hurtful. Or, if not so, are not those of Abana and Pharpar, in Damascus equally good, and much more convenient ? So he turned and went away. His servants, less in passion, presume to advise, and their counsel, delivered by one of the chief, is taken. If the prophet bid thee, and so on ? Then went he and dipped himself, and his flesh came again like that of a child, pure and sweet. See his gratitude from verse 15. Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel, &c.

He next offers a large present or blessing, to the LORD's servant, who handsomely refuses to accept. It is his gracious work, whom thou now, more than ever, dost believe in, and worship. Looking back upon the whole, how wonderfully good is God to upright minds ? His secret is with them that fear him. Naaman despises not a glimpse of truth, and is carried still forward. At length, he is cured in soul and body together. The meek God doth guide into judgment. They shall come to know whatever is necessary to their salvation.

Means, however, must be used, though small they may be in appearance. It is enough, that God appoints. Divine authority and promises ensure the blessing to Jordan. Of
 GOD

God is the increase. Superstitious pride should reflect upon this. So ought hateful, and hating dividers.

Hearken with patience to good advice, even from an inferior^a. Lofty speculations are not always the safest. Correct anger in others, and do this with softness. Simplicity is the garb of true religion^b.

Be grateful both to God, and to men. This was much for Naaman's honour. Neither be uncivilly rough. Prophets, in particular, should exemplify self denial. At best, they are only divine instruments.

XVIII. GEHAZI SMITTEN.

Chap. v. 27. *The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.*

THEY that will be rich, run great hazards^c. Even the servant and companion of Elisha did suffer from it. In one sad hour, he forgets all the spiritual advantages he had been favoured with. What Elisha did nobly refuse, Gehazi did covet. He is overcome by the sight of loaded carriages with presents, and devises to obtain them, by a slanderous lie. As the LORD liveth, &c. One great evil begets a worse, and sometimes nearly without end.

Naaman is complaisant, from religious principle. Is all well? and so on. Is there peace, marginally! The liar returns, Behold, even now, my master hath sent me, &c. Give, I pray thee, to two young men of the prophets, what himself cannot afford. Deliberate, egregious villany! More than what he sought, it is probable, he could not carry back.

The grateful generous Naaman loads him. And, when they came to the tower where Elisha lodged, or more agreeable to the margin, the secret place, wherein he was accustomed to lay up; Gehazi took the two bags from their hands,

a Matth. xi. 25. b Mic. vi. 8. Tit. ii. 11, &c.

c 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.
 &c.

&c. To be deposited unknown to others. Then, let the men depart. Adventuring to make his appearance before Elisha, he is asked, Whence comest thou? To which a new, base, and impudent falsehood, is returned. Much like Acts v. from verse 3. At once untrue and impious. The master discloses this to him, saying, Is it a time to receive money? And so on. The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman shall cleave into thee, and thy posterity for ever. Such of them, at least, as had any knowledge of the transaction, and so to suffer during life, or according to others, generations, afterwards not a few. In this last case, the wise love of heaven would make it up to innocent children spiritually, and eternally. Meanwhile, a wicked parent must feel much. Thus, certain vices do make long, and dreadful transmissions; such as the sensual, riotous, and treasonable.

So Gehazi went out from Elisha leprous; and of the worst kind, white as snow. Lying is next to inseparable from covetousness. For most part, soon known, hated and otherwise punished. Down-right plagues to the social compact^b. How many oblique methods do such try for gain? These should not be taught, even by warning them. In certain cases, sacrilege itself will be ventured upon. Oaths aggravate falsehood^c.

XIX. PROPHETS REMOVE TO JORDAN.

Chap. vi. 3. *And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go.*

FROM the earliest times, the Jews had prophets sent among them^d. Though a chief part of their business was to foretell, yet did they instruct, warn, and encourage. They were, for most part trained up in schools, denominated from them; and in different places of the land.

^a 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10.

^b Eph. iv. 27, &c.

^c Eph. iv. 31.

^d Jer. vii. 25.

Besides studying the law, pious celebrations of Omnipotent Love, was their frequent exercise. This, too, was called prophesying, and in which others did occasionally join them ^d. The schools of Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal, were likewise famous. At this last, Elisha, as their distinguished head, was spoken to, for a removal. Behold now the place where we are is strait, &c. Though numerous, they were unwilling to divide. To this, Elisha gave an immediate consent. Yet could they not think of his leaving them. He answers to their request, I go.

Intimacies, when commenced young, are not easily broken off. The best of natures, and religious withal, do feel this most ^e. Elisha, too, did wonders, which they would incline to be witnesses of. Hereby, both their own, and the faith of others was improved ^f.

The trees were numerous about Jordan, it is probable; where, in place of mountain-cells, materials might be had for houses of better accommodation. The woods, considerably cleared, would make shelter and walking agreeable; without tempting, like groves, to what was idolatrous and sensual. Here the songsters of heaven would collect themselves, so as to aid a devout turn, with the soothing murmurs of Jordan. Wood, water, and music, all conjoin ^g.

Counsel and might together did join in carrying on their work. After all, interruptions will happen. One of the students felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water ^h, which gave rise to a miracle. Alas, master, said he, for it was borrowed. An instrument valuable, and probably rare. Suspicions too, might arise, hurtful to the character of a grave and professedly pious student. All justly moving to a tender conscience.

The pious humane superior, felt for his spiritual son; and recovered the axe-head in a manner that should be well attended to.

d 1 Sam. xix.

e Mal. xxxiii. 16, &c.

f Luke i. 3.

g Psal. civ. 10, &c.

h Verse 4.

This,

This, with half thinkers, may appear an interposition beneath the sole author of miracle-working. But, when read with genuine candour, will appear every way worthy of him; to encourage true godliness, and strengthen faith; saying, Who is like to Israel's God? Both in themselves, and among others.

XX. ELISHA SAVED FROM THE KING OF SYRIA.

Chap. vi. 23. *And he prepared great provision for them: And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.*

BUT a few there are, who soberly inquire after truth. So disregardless Benhadad, king of Syria, even after a most signal deliverance; he forgets all, and designs utter ruin for Israel, and their now most eminent prophet. Flattered by inferiors, he concert's with them an invasionⁱ. Yet once and again is obstructed by means of Elisha. Hence, he is roused to absolute fury; suspecting that certain of his servant-officers might be concerned, one of them at length ascribes the whole disappointment of his measures to Israel's prophet, as privy to the very secrets of his bed-chamber^k.

From Dotham, Elisha with a servant, in room of Gehazi, fled, hunted by horsemen, and war-chariots. Trusting in God, he calmly replies to his attendant in fright; they that be with us are more than they that be with them. After prayer by the prophet, the morning lours; darkness ensues to the blinding of their eyes; whilst a vision of light appears to the prophet, and his servant.

Then came Elisha to the groping Syrian foe, and said, this is not the way to get into possession him whom you seek.

ⁱ Verse 2, &c.

^k Verse 13.

True this was, though not declaring every circumstance. When the darkness removed, they saw that they were in midst of Samaria, with its king and Elisha just at hand. Whereupon the former asks for leave to smite, and was forbid. To kill in cold blood, the man of God would not suffer. It is base, and cowardly. Mark what follows, and admire! They are not thy captives, but those of heaven. Let this be read. Gloriously beneficent!

A war of defence, well ended, is matter of pious praise. Let protection to truth and right be prayed for. This seldom fails of good effect. Stratagems in war are not understood as lies. Terms of peace are to be conceived as bonds of lasting union.

It is good for a nation to be able to say, that war doth not originate from them. And it is for the glory of such, that they be faithful to engagements.

XXI. FAMINE AT SAMARIA CEASETH.

Chap. vii. 1. *Thus saith the LORD, To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.*

THE famine at Samaria had been long and terrible. Nature shudders to think of its effects. Superstitious penitence is exemplified by the idolatrous king himself, with cruel bodily sufferings. Suspecting Elisha as the cause, by the interest he had with his God; he swore by that very God to be his ruin. Whilst the prophet sat in his house, and several elders with him, a man was sent before the king, to execute what had been rashly and impiously sworn to. His coming is supernaturally announced by Elisha, and proper instructions given to those around him.

They are both nigh, is meant by the question put by the prophet. And, while he yet talked with them, behold the messenger

messenger came down, and charges their LORD GOD with their sad national distress. Why then delay to punish his instrument? A hideous thought! But the prophet's return doth either appease or disable him from striking. Hear ye then, what my GOD saith, &c. By to-morrow, about that time, bread and other necessities were to be sold much cheaper; and that in the gate of Samaria, where both courts and markets were held. An attendant of the king expresses his incredulity by strong language. If the LORD whom you speak of, would make windows, &c. Wit ill-timed, as it was irreligious. Not uncommon neither, both before and since.

Elisha, however, stops not to argue with him; but proceeds to assure the ridiculing man of what he should see, and yet not be able to eat of. Very singular this, and fitted to move attention.

The colloquy which follows, between four starving lepers, excluded from society, is very curious, and should be perused with care. Let us come and fall unto the host of the besieging Syrians, &c. If they save us for captives, we shall live; if they kill us, we shall speedily die. And they do so, in the twilight of evening. As they approached the camp, behold there was not a single man there; for the LORD MOST HIGH had struck them with a panic.

They left their tents, with all that was in them, and fled. An amazing fulfilment to Elisha's prophesy, and only to be accounted for, after a supernatural method. Who, save an Omniscient God, could foresee what depended upon so many contingencies? What human imagination could devise such a history? Unequalled quite, till the times of our SAVIOUR.

But see, and admire the sequel. The four leprous men adventure from camp to camp, where they found food and drink in great plenty; besides silver, gold, and garments. After enriching themselves, they informed the Samaritans. A day of good things verily! First, as was natural, they inform the king's household. The chief ruler supposes an ambush to have been laid. Not amiss as a general. He proceeds with caution, and finds all as had been told him, and even

even more to common advantage ; fulfilling Elisha's words to the very letter.

The LORD of the king's bed-chamber is appointed to the charge of the gate, and trampled to death, by a hurrying crowd, in the sight of great plenty, which yet he could not eat. Such was the predicted fate of a scorner, and open to all. An eminent witness for divine truth. Yet, alas, though felt at the time, not with lasting impression ! Idolaters they did abide, till led into captivity ; which still continues.

XXII. HAZAEL.

Chap. viii. 12. *And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord ? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel : Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.*

HAZAEL, some considerable time before, had it foretold to him, that he should one day be king of Syria, and that with so much certainty as though God did appoint Elijah to anoint him, which yet was not done, more than Nimshi there spoken of, and after the same manner. It was in the decree of heaven and by way of permission.

Thus was Hazael to become king, though most unrighteously. He did usurp the throne, and after various cruel crimes.

Benhadad, the king in possession, falling sick, by advice of a woman whom he had obliged, did send to Elisha, by Hazael, and with a handsome present, according to the manner of the East, to inquire if the disease would prove mortal. The prophet's answer was, it might not, if left to the disease alone, for neither duty nor power, it may be at the time might allow him to go further. Howbeit, adds he, the LORD hath shewed me, that he, after some other way, shall surely die. A word of caution to the prince.

Then settling his countenance upon Hazael, and in visible horror, the man of God himself did weep. This the king's officer did ask the reason of ; to whom Elisha did answer, as
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in verse 12. because of the evil that thou shalt do, &c. And Hazael said, but what, is thy servant a dog, that he should act after such manner? Elisha adds, the LORD hath shewed me, that thou shalt be king of Syria.

The rest is terrible, but may be perused in private ^a. Hence may be seen, how little people, even of rank and education, may know themselves. We wonder less at the rashness of youth. But the ignorance of age and literature is much less pitiable; yet is not this rare. Think of David's quiet, till the prophet Nathan came; of St. Peter, too, under the New Testament. Such records are meant to shew mankind how necessary self-knowledge is ^b.

One temptation hearkened to, may be very hazardous. Had not Hazael been ambitious, he would have shuddered to commence a transgressor deliberately, but to smother one in a fever—a king, and with an appearance of friendship, was indeed like a dog. The aspiring mind did lead to this. Resist in time what sin doth easiest beset. But he that despiseth little things will perish by little and little.

Wicked men, and seducers grow worse and worse ^c. Mark the sad progress of Hazael, from burning to ripping up. In course of time one breach doth terminate in what is irreparable. O youth, youth, make a bold stand in the beginning. Take then a hint of friendship ^d. It is easier to keep clean than to cleanse ^e.

XXIII. MEANS NEGLECTED, AGGRAVATE GUILT.

Chap. xvii. 13, &c. *Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments, and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.*

BESIDES common dictates of reason, ALMIGHTY LOVE has used other means to sanctify and save men. They

^a From verse 14. ^b Rom. ii. 1, &c.

^c James i. 14, 15. ^d Psal. cxix. 9.
^e He b. iii. 16. Matth. xi. 28, &c.

Hezekiah made choice of the former, and that in part out of the temple-treasures, with some of its ornaments.

This served only to increase the Assyrian rapacity. A second message was sent yet more exorbitant, accompanied with blasphemous railings, which exceedingly vexed the pious king, and led him in deep penitence to the temple, which in his late terror he had so rashly injured.

Here he meets some of his chiefs visibly humbled as himself was. Thither they sent for Isaiah, the son of Amoz, a most renowned prophet, verse 3. Their trouble and rebuke they do not conceal, but lament; having still to all appearance the prospect of worse, as when a woman has no strength to bring forth. It may be, notwithstanding, that the LORD our God will hear, and so on.

And Isaiah, moved by divine impulse, did make a suitable reply, Be not affraid of the words, &c. Behold, I will send a blast upon him, verse 35. A rumour of warning from different quarters, the blasphemer was to hear. Think now of the proud boasting letter put into Hezekiah's hands by a messenger from Rabshakeh, and how devoutly the king did spread it before God.

Omniscience needs not this, but it was an evidence of great concern and affection. So is it in other cases, to be particular when petitioning. A chief use of prayer is to affect ourselves, and so qualify to receive. It likewise heightens the sense of divine perfection and goodness. Thus all do feel who restrain not prayer before God.

Hezekiah's address is admirable. Thou art God, even thou alone, &c. Sublimely grand and sweet. The contrast here is fit and powerfully affecting. Israel's God, is sole, universal Sovereign. Bow down thine ear, is spoken after the manner of men, to signify a special attention. The choice of judgment is left to unerring wisdom.

The gods of those whom the Assyrian had destroyed were properly speaking none. Save thou us, O LORD, whose are all the kingdoms of the earth, that these may know, is the sum of Hezekiah's devout request. It is generously spiritual. He succeeds, verse 20, 35.

Pride is smote by a pestilence. How memorable a victory over polytheism and idolatry ? It must have been soon known through all the east.

XXV. HEZEKIAH'S SICKNESS AND RECOVERY.

Chap. xx. 3. *I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore.*

SOME few days, or years after, the above pious Hezekiah is taken sick, and life not expected. Set thy house in order, said the prophet, for thou shalt surely die. Still however revocable, as in the case of Nineveh^a. By house, we are to understand kingdom. Having as yet no son that we read of, and various public affairs to settle, he might, as a patriot prince, be much affected so as to weep sore. As an individual and good, death could not be terrible to him ; whereas apprehension of public disturbances, and that idolatry might have an advantage, were great trials. Hence he prays fervently.

How must such an one have been affected with probable hurt to good faith ? Less than this could not be the cause of sore weeping. A deluge of superstition with infidel anarchy were tremendous prospects to a noble enlightened mind.

See how he argues in prayer, verse 3. I beseech thee, O LORD, &c. Familiarly devout it must be owned, yet does he not boast. A sincere obedience may be gratefully reflected upon^b. While precious truth and holiness are opposed, a reformation little better than just begun is in great danger, especially when powerful supports are removed. On such grounds, I presume to ask for continued life. Accordingly he is heard.

The word of the LORD nearly that instant came unto Isaiah, saying, Turn again, &c. Behold, I will heal thee, and so on. The city and kingdom, amidst many trials, shall be preserved. Fifteen years are yet allowed thee. Amazing are the condescensions which follow to upright piety. A lump of figs is

^a Jonah iii. 7.

^b 2 Cor. i. 12.

made use of, to discuss the boil ; a lesson to make use of second means, though not so certain as at present. A sign is given to Hezekiah, to ease the ardour of his soul, for continued usefulness. Not very easy to explain, but far from impossible. The like are not now either to be expected or sought. Soon as people can, they should settle their secular affairs, and not perplex dying hours. Manage without delay, whatever is most important.

XXVI. BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY FORETOLD.

Chap. xx. 17. *Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store unto this day, shall be carried into Babylon : Nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.*

WITHOUT due care, successes, whether temporal or spiritual, are apt to elevate, and endanger. Hezekiah was an example of this. He had been favoured with various miracles, and yet, upon a congratulatory address, with some presents from Merodach, an idolatrous king of Babylon, he not only accepts the presents, which was, in effect, making alliance with him, but shews the messengers, by an express order, all the house of his precious things. Impolitic, as well as vain. Perhaps too, distrusting Providence, he relies not a little upon an arm of flesh. Let Isaiah's interview be well thought of, from verse 14.

The prophet announces a decree of JEHOVAH, irreversible against his kingdom. Behold, the days come, &c. A dreadful certification ! Yet submitted to with calmness. Peace in his own days, both religious and civil, was to be allowed. Each of them fulfilled to a title. The captivity, in particular, one hundred and twenty-five years after ; to be the entire cure of Polytheism to them, and idolatrous worship. Learn from the above, to strengthen belief.

Also, to avoid as much as may be, unequal connections.

Amendment from being chastised. To adore Omnipotent Sovereignty.

XXVII. JOSIAH.

Chap. xxiii. 25. *And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses ; neither after him arose there any like him.*

AFTER a number of wicked idolatrous princes, this worthy character appears. By former vicious carelessness, the law itself was lost, at least as to any one full correct copy.

Among other good works of Josiah, he repaired the temple ; when Hilkiah, then high priest, found an entire copy, and it is not improbable, written by Moses ; with the history afterwards of the Jewish people

Upon perusal of national sins, and certifications against them ; Josiah is moved to a great degree. He rent his clothes in grief, &c. and communicated to his chief rulers, the contents of what he had read. This led to an immediate design of general reformation. Truly glorious evidence of chapter xxii. Susceptible tender heart !

False religious principles, and worship, are not easily overcome, even by high authority and zeal. Yet did this young pious king make wonderful progress. He would have all his people better instructed ; and sent men of prime ability through the land, for that purpose, having well transcribed copies along with them. A wise judicious measure ! And followed at our blessed reformation from papal error and tyranny . Josiah celebrated the passover likewise, with his people, as a special enlightening ordinance. The house of God, as has been said, he decently fitted up.

Josiah's heart was wholly devoted to God. Duty was no force upon him, but his delight. In public and private the

same, so that all might know where to find him. For his sake, and that of a few good kings, the captivity is delayed. Happy beneficent souls! Esteem and love will honour their memory. Subsequent order will maintain this.

P A R T V I I I .

I. THE BABYLONISH CAPTIVITY.

Chap. xxv. 4. *And the city was broken up, and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate, between two walls, which is by the king's garden ; (now the Chaldees were against the city round about ;) and the king went the way toward the plain.*

THE most tremendous evil that befell the people of Judah, prior to their total overthrow by the Romans, was the destruction of their city and temple, by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Zedekiah, after some dreadful cruelties towards him, is led captive, with most of his fighting men, who did survive the siege. Those left, were harassed beyond measure. All was desolation and horror ! As much power only is left them, as to fulfil Gen. xlix. 10. Psal. cxxxvii. throughout. An affecting elegiac. Neither sceptre, nor lawgiver, as yet, was altogether removed, and many of them did worship.

Under Nehemiah and Ezra, their present miseries were to terminate, in a complete cure to their idolatrous tendencies ^a. Jeremiah, himself a captive, speaks of those sad times, and foreseen restoration ^b. Thus saith the God of Israel, and so

^a 2 Chron. Chapters xii. & xxii. with Isa. xx. from verse 24. Rom. xi. 33, &c.

^b Chap. xii. 7, &c.

on. I will plant, &c. Be not afraid. They would not take advice from the prophet, which did enhance their miseries ^a. Fear thou not, after all, O Jacob, &c. I will make a full end of the nations whither I have driven thee, &c. ^b. The judgement of Babylon, and the redemption of Israel.

A spirit of penitence is looked for ^c. Weeping and seeking the LORD. Then shall the proud stumble and fall. All accomplished by Cyrus, king of Persia; whom Isaiah did expressly name. Such coherence of prophecy, and fulfilment, demonstrates scripture truth.

Zerubabel rebuilds the temple; Nehemiah the city; and Ezra restores the law. Judah thence-forward has been steadfast to the divine unity; and in that respect, a pattern to the world; even after much suffering under Antiochus Epiphany, and others, for their pure faith. Pray much for their still more entire recovery to gospel belief ^d.

I. C H R O N I C L E S.

II. DAVID'S ADVICE TO SOLOMON.

Chap. xxviii. 9. *And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the GOD of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

DYING words of the good ought to be impressive. Hence, king David is led to speak as by the text, in presence of an august assembly.

Fathers of true piety, like Abraham, Isaac, and others,

^a Jer xlv. 27.

^b Chap. i.

^c Verse 4.

^d Rom. xi. 15, &c.

should

should be imitated with much affection. Distinct knowledge of God is a prime principle of uniform obedience. It imparts love ^a.

A perfect, or upright heart, and a willing mind, in divine service, is every thing. Angels themselves cannot go beyond this. An all wise, munificent God, requires no more than what must quicken every other power ^b. The law is their rule, and only the highest measures of obedience can satisfy them ^c. Those of an opposite character want sincere will.

He who searches the heart cannot mistake an affecting consideration ^d.

God will be found of all who seek his aid. To forsake his worship is to forsake him, and to be forsaken by him. Dreadful certified crime! Evil and numerous examples are very bewitching. So did Solomon sadly experience ^e. The usual gradation of vice is, first to neglect God, and then to forsake him.

III. MOTIVES TO PUBLIC USEFULNESS.

Chap. xxix. 14, 15. *But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? For all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.*

DAVID had it much at heart, to build the temple of God; but, accepting his will, this honour was reserved for the more peaceful days of Solomon his son. The devout father laid in considerable stores for that purpose, and was imitated by people under him, of all ranks. Whence that noble elevation of gratitude, verse 10, &c. Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel, &c.

^a Psal. i. 6. Jo. xvii. 3.---x. 27. Psal. xxiii. throughout. ^b Tit. ii. 9, 10.

^c Phil. iii. 14, &c. Prov. iv. 18. ^d Gen. xxxix. 9. Psal. cxxxix. 1, &c.

^e 2 Cor. vi. 16, &c.

His conclusion is at once modest, and patriotic; *Who am I, &c.* Such motives and arguments may be still of great use to consider. As, that all generous motions come of God, as a prompter to act conformably. He is good, and doth good incessantly. The pious wish to imitate him with fervour. This is the sum both of their virtue and happiness. Even to will, argues special excellence. A benevolent idea is truly precious, and to be regarded as a divine call. When felt and yielded to, he states himself, as a receiver. He moves as a suppliant, and then accepts as a loan ^a. Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these, my brethren, &c. ^b.

Yet, after all this, it is but a small share of his own. How many comforts from him has the donor had? Past reckoning. How much still remains? What a privilege, to act as almoners for heaven. To withhold is a thought of horror.

Having but few days to live, we ought to be more busily employed in good-beneficent works. An hastening last hour should be made as easy, and even joyous as possible. Endeavour to emulate those of former ages. Be not glued to a foreign land. Transfer rather to heaven. Lay up treasures there ^c. Why attach thyself to a fleeting shadow? Be rich toward God.

P A R T IX.

I. JEWS RESTORED FROM CAPTIVITY.

Ezra i. 3. *Who is there among you of all his people? His GOD be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD GOD of Israel (he is the GOD) which is in Jerusalem.*

THE method by which Cyrus, king of Persia, did conquer Babylon, was foretold with wonderful precision;

^a Matth. xxv. 35, &c.

^b Heb. xiii. 16. Isa. lviii. 4, &c.

^c 1 Tim. vi. 18, &c.

and

and the same way accomplished. Then was the captivity to end ¹. Most amazingly particular; and that above two hundred years before. How exactly agreeable to Ezra's history? A vast many thousands returned under Zerubbabel; still more in a short time after. The altar was built by them, and sacrifices offered. In the second year, a new temple was founded, with much exultation ². Yet though much inferior outwardly, it was to be honoured with MESSIAH's presence; the chief of all glories. After forty-six years, and in the sixth year of Darius, king of Persia, it was finished, though not without manifold interruptions. After crucifying the Prince of Life, the veil of the temple was rent ³. An evidence of the LORD's departure from the holy of holies; and where the impious Caligula would have his own statue set up. A source of dreadful Jewish wars, and terminating in their ruin by Titus Vespasian.

Thus was Jacob's oracle ⁴ completely fulfilled, and those of our divine SAVIOUR ⁵, even to astonishment. A sure and lasting testimony to gospel-truth. Only weakness and prejudice can hold out against this.

Known unto GOD are all his works from the beginning. By foretold contingences, a Nebuchadnezzar to punish, and a Cyrus to restore. The upright good must triumph in the end ⁶. Let communities take warning from exemplary vengeance.

II. EZRA.

Chap. vii. 10. *For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgements.*

CERTAIN parts of this sacred book might have been added to what was written by Ezra, after his decease;

a Hos. iii. 4. Jer. xxv. 9, &c. Chap. xxix. 10. Isa. xxiv. 28---xlvi. 4.

b Ezra iii. 12. Hag. ii. 3. c Matth. xxvii. 51. d Gen. xlix. 10.

e Matth. xxiv. Luke 21. f Psal. lxxxiv. 11.

with short comments, relative to his character and doings. He was a ready scribe, studious and diligent, like the rest of Levi's tribe ^a. Perhaps such office might have subsisted from the time of Moses, being taught in schools of the prophets ^b.

Their usual preaching places were the temple, and synagogues, after being licensed. To teach and exemplify was their honour, from a prepared heart. A situation, at times, of trouble and danger. Ezra had been bred at court, and did write to Artaxerxes king of Persia. He was in use, probably, to transcribe copies of the law, to the princes, from Cyrus downwards. Hence, their rescripts are not unseldom devout. For other scribes, too, he might write, who were less expert ^c. Gloriously patriotic !

Nor did he neglect the multitude of Jewish captives, who chose to abide in and about Babylon, and other provinces ; who built synagogues, and maintained scribes. A blessing to Ezra's heart ; and mean, afterwards, of propagating the gospel. Wonderful gracious Providence !

Work like that of Ezra required much seeking into the law ; a heart also piously prepared. More for practice than speculation. To attempt the evasion of holiness is dreadful. To teach in God's name, and according to his word, is to teach with authority. Thus saith the LORD, must affect.

NEHEMIAH.

Chap. vi. 11. *And I said, Should such a man as I flee ? and who is there that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life ? I will not go in.*

THE author of this sacred book shines admirably throughout the whole, as devout, a lover of his country, pru-

^a 1 Chron. xxiv. 6.

^b Compare 1 Cor. i. 20. Matth. xxiii. 34.

^c 2 Chron. xvii. 9.

dent and brave. When advanced to be the king's cup-bearer, he forgets not his people, and the faith of his ancestors. Finding after all that Cyrus and his successors had done, that Jerusalem and the temple lay in rubbish, he wept sore by himself and could not conceal his grief. It was observed by his prince, Artaxerxes Nemon. Nehemiah, for a short space, became affraid of despotic power, yet trusting to God, and a good conscience, he opens to him the whole affair. His appeal to the king was noble, and his request was heard while praying in himself.

Permission is given him to visit Judah for a stated time, with letters of recommendation to all the governors of his numerous provinces, and a most suitable equipage. This meets with envy from Jewish oppressors, so as to lay snares for his life. To all which he bravely answers, Should such an one as I flee? Not even the temple will I go into for being safe.

He had a task assigned him by God, and would not delay execution. The same God had hitherto protected him. Nay given him signal success. How base then to act the coward? His cause too was that of heaven. True and well-grounded heroism!

In good works begun, every step of providence should be regarded. Isaiah's predictions, and what Cyrus had done, could not be forgotten by one so pious. His own zeal, and the measures taken hitherto had divine countenance. His coadjutors were many and bold while under his eye. Long and large experiences of grace do strengthen to trust and work. I live but to be useful, and to quicken others ^d.

IV. SCRIPTURE LECTURING.

Chap. viii. 8. *So they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

FROM the time of a complete cure to polytheism and idolatry by being captives in Babylon, the Jews first

^d Psal. cxxxvi.

built a temple for pure divine worship, and the use of God's word, verse 1, &c. Ezra, the chief scribe, did then principally officiate. Hopeful were the signs of goodwill from those of both sexes. More readers than one seem to have succeeded each other, and the most able of them did comment.

No wonder that Ezra, meeting with such encouragement, did bless the LORD, and the people did answer, Amen. Passages difficult from want of use, or being long accustomed to the Chaldea language, had the right sense given them. A beneficial mode of instruction, and ever to be followed. Ancient original languages require this, with antiquated customs. Hence must appear the need of previous learning, and care for admission into sacred office. Moderate skill with diligence will do much good service. Others seem to climb up rather than come in by the door. Well warranted lecturers they can never be.

The written subject should be read, as much as possible, with a distinct articulate voice. All should study this however differently otherwise they may be qualified. Plain full speech and unaffected, is most agreeable. Demosthenes had a defect in pronouncing to overcome, which he did with no small pains, and for a name. How much more ought a regard for human souls to operate? Monotony and canting are to be avoided.

It is to be lamented when voices are unequal to large stated congregations, and admirable qualities are next to lost; age often, and unavoidably, must produce this, and seems to demand congregational assistance. To give the true sense is most material, and will require much preparation. A readiness for mere speech ought to be distrusted. Few if any can always answer for a good frame. Circumstances may disconcert the unprepared. Our very best endeavours are all little enough. Where original words are ambiguous, the context well attended to may be a great help. Implore God, and then give his own meaning. Let the illiterate have an honest teaching. Babes ought to be fed ^g. Attentive hearing is a great spur to pastoral diligence ^h.

^g James ii. 5. ^h 1 Peter ii. 1, &c.

^h Isa. ii. 1, &c.

V. SABBATH.

Chap. xiii. 17. *Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and prophane the Sabbath-day?*

PLACES and times for divine worship are a high privilege, and require to be gratefully acknowledged. This was strictly bound upon the Jewsⁱ. Others, though perhaps not to an equal degree, need to be devoutly educated. Such seasons, therefore, ought not to be hurt by outward employments. So judged good Nehemiah. An example still for those of rank and learning. It is real patriotism.

A land of Excellency for pious means enhances the guilt of transgressors, especially where much has been done to preserve them. They ought bravely to be testified against. Happy people who have national authority to corroborate their measures. At once to insult God and man is intolerable. Large trading cities are much in danger of those impieties. What may be done in six days should be left to these. Former divine judgements are fit warnings. They brought Jerusalem and the temple into rubbish. Whence proceeded woeful ignorance and guilt. An unavoidable consequence.

Personal and domestic reformations, as to public worship, would be of infinite service. Likewise that religious ministers be duly qualified. A LORD's Day has much the advantage of a Jewish Sabbath. How beneficial, how pleasant to rise above the things of time^k.

ⁱ Jer. xvii. 19, &c.

^k Psal. lxxxiv. throughout.

ESTHER.

VI. ESTHER'S ZEAL.

Chap. iv. 16. *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night nor day : I also and my maidens will fast likewise ; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law ; and if I perish, I perish.*

ESTHER, though originally a private person, and Jewess, was the choice of Ahasuerus, king of Persia, to be his consort. She was very fair, and educated under Mordecai, a devout uncle. Her conversation no less than her beauty did captivate the prince.

After advancement, she, as directed by Mordecai, did for a time conceal her belief, to profess afterwards with more advantage. Both together mourned at heart the state of their countrymen, far from their native land, and opportunities for pure religious worship. Mordecai lay in mourning posture before the palace to be commiserated. Haman, a prime minister of the king, and great favourite, takes offence, that he paid him no obeisance. At length coming to the knowledge of Mordecai's country and belief, he contrives a horrible malicious falsehood for his destruction. The king's decree, for support of this was but too easily obtained.

Then Mordecai, probably inspired, having before this discovered a traiterous conspiracy against Ahasuerus, and a record made of the matter in the public journals, the queen is advised by her uncle, heroically to exert herself, which was done, and must be attentively perused. The whole numerous provinces of Persia were filled with Jews, intended by Haman, to be cut off at once. Mordecai's wisdom counteracted him effectually. The whole is curious, and replete with instruction. Queen Esther is prevailed upon by her uncle to do what might have

have cost her death to save her people, that is, to go into the king's inner court uncalled, with a petition.

Tremblingly she adventures, and is spared. She was advisable by proven worth and friendship. An excellent virtue. Argument is heard with patience and attention, verse 13. Thou art now called by God to shine in the rank of heroines. Her reply was noble and full of devotion; Go, gather thy people, &c. I also and my maidens will do the same. And, if I perish, I perish. Submission in the sublime! Brave, faithful and beneficent! Who so fit to train as those who are young? Let advice be calm, and argument clear. In the use of best means acknowledge God.

VII. MORDECAI AND HAMAN.

Chap. v. 13. *Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.*

THE contrast between Mordecai and Haman's characters suggests a variety of useful reflections. The former of these was prudent, and of course cautious; the latter rash to his own ruin. Being encompassed with external advantages, he could suffer no delays in the executing of his pleasure. This drew him into fatal snares. Mordecai was possessed of high religious principles, and was at pains to disseminate these, whereas Haman had none. He was altogether selfish and cruel. He sent for Zeresh his wife, and told her of all his glory. Nevertheless he is miserable from want of a mere trifle. How much lost to reason, and right sentiments. His wife advises him to what was shocking, and he consents^d. How foolish and impious both was his discontent?

Go, provide a gallows for Mordecai, and be merry, is what pleases them. How humble was the unmerited object of his displeasure, and how insufferable Haman's pride? Devout patriotic mourning did occupy the one, whilst the other was filled with proud wrath. Humility itself he could not abide

^d Psal. vii. 14, 15.

the signs of. Wretched therefore in midst of plenty. The death of a poor man, to be followed with that of thousands, are what his heart was full of ! What an object of horror and detestation ! God resisteth the proud. How much happier is Mordecai in his generous grief ? There is such a thing as rejoicing in tribulation. A whole world in possession would not satisfy some. God is a sure and lasting portion ^e. A cottage with bread and water will suffice for this. Contentment is gain.

What enjoyment can equal that of a well governed temper ? Says Haman, in his own mind, Mordecai must be hung, or I must be wretched ! What a precarious wicked state of soul. He is his own tormentor. Ever liable to disappointment ^f.

Go, rule thy will, bid thy wild passions all be still :

Know God, and bring thyself to know,

The joys which from religion flow.

GAT.

It is weak to complain of partial outward divisions. The poor may be rich ^g. Devotion elevates the soul. Rejoice and do good.

^e Luke xii. 15. ^f Psal. iv. 6. xxxvii. 16. ^f Psal. xxxvii. 11, &c. ^g Jam. ii. 5.

F I N I S.

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